TENNYSON

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

AND

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F. J. ROWE

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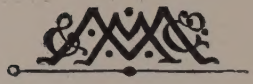

TENNYSON

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

AND

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

WITH

INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

BY

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION,

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Biography. I. Tennyson the man: (1) His sense of Law shown in his conceptions (*a*) of Nature; (*b*) of Freedom; (*c*) of Love; (*d*) of Scenery. (2) His nobility of thought. (3) His simplicity of emotion. II. Tennyson the Poet: (1) As Representative of his Age. (2) As Artist: (*a*) His observation; (*b*) His scholarship; (*c*) His expressiveness; (*d*) His avoidance of commonplace; (*e*) His metrical characteristics: harmony of rhythm; melody of diction —Conclusion.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was born on August 6th, 1809, at Somersby, a village in Lincolnshire, of which his father was rector. The wolds surrounding his home, the fen some miles away, with its "level waste" and "trenched waters," and the sea on the Lincolnshire coast, with "league-long rollers" and "table-shore," are pictured again and again in his poems. Biography

When seven years old, he went to the Louth Grammar School, and returning home after a few years there, was educated with his elder brother Charles by his father. Charles and Alfred Tennyson, while yet youths, published in 1827 a small volume of poetry entitled *Poems by Two Brothers.* In 1828 the two brothers entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where Alfred gained the University Chancellor's gold medal for a poem on *Timbuctoo,* and where he formed an intimate friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam (son of the historian),

whose memory he has immortalised in *In Memoriam*. Among his other Cambridge friends may be mentioned R. C. Trench (afterwards Archbishop of Dublin), Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), J. M. Kemble (the Anglo-Saxon scholar), Merivale (the historian, afterwards Dean of Ely), James Spedding, and W. H. Brookfield. In 1830 Tennyson published his *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, among which are to be found some sixty pieces that are preserved in the present issues of his works. In 1832 *Poems by Alfred Tennyson* appeared, and then, after an interval of ten years, two more volumes, also with the title *Poems*. His reputation as a poet was now established, though his greatest works were yet to come. Chief among these are *The Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850), *Maud* (1855), *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885), and *Enoch Arden* (1864). In 1875 Tennyson published his first drama, *Queen Mary*, followed by *Harold* (1877), *The Cup* (acted in 1881), *The Promise of May* (1882), *The Falcon*, and *Becket* (1884). On the death of Wordsworth in 1850, Tennyson succeeded him as Poet Laureate. In 1884, he was gazetted Baron of Aldworth and Farringford, his two seats in Sussex and in the Isle of Wight. He died on October 6th, 1892.

I. Tennyson the man.

I. Of all modern English poets Tennyson has most readers: the chief elements of the powerful charm which he exercises over the hearts and minds of all English-speaking peoples will be evident on even a brief survey of the character of his mind as revealed in his works, and of the form and matter of his verse. At the basis of all Tennyson's teaching, indeed of all his work, is Tennyson the man. The mould of a poet's mind is the mould in which his thoughts and even his modes of

expression must run, and the works of a poet cannot be fully understood unless we understand the poet himself.

1. Conspicuous among the main currents of thought and feeling that flow through the body of his writings is his perception of the movement of Law throughout the worlds of sense and of spirit: he recognises therein a settled scheme of great purposes underlying a universal order and gradually developing to completion. (1) His sense of Law

(*a*) Illustrations of this recognition of pervading Law may be found in his conception of Nature, and in his treatment of human action and of natural scenery. Nature, which to Shelley was a spirit of Love, and to Wordsworth a living and speaking presence of Thought, is to Tennyson a process of Law including both. Even in the midst of his mourning over the seeming waste involved in the early death of his friend, he can write in *In Memoriam* shown in his conceptions (*a*) of Nature;

> I curse not nature, no, nor death;
> For nothing is that errs from law.

In all the workings of Nature he traces the evolution of the great designs of God—

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves.

In *The Higher Pantheism*, a similar thought is found:

> God is law, say the wise; O soul, and let us rejoice,
> For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

(*b*) Allied to this faith that the universe is "roll'd round by one fixt law" is the poet's sympathy with disciplined (*b*) of Freedom;

order in the various spheres of human action. In politics his ideal Freedom is "sober-suited"; it is such a Freedom as has been evolved by the gradual growth of English institutions, a Freedom which

> slowly broadens down
> From precedent to precedent.

He has small faith in sudden outbursts of revolutionary fervour; he thinks that the "red fool fury of the Seine," the "flashing heats" of the "frantic city," retard man's progress towards real liberty: they "but fire to blast the hopes of men." If liberty is to be a solid and lasting possession, it must be gained by patient years of working and waiting, not by "Raw Haste, half-sister of Delay." So also Tennyson's love for his own country is regulated and philosophic: he has given us a few patriotic martial lyrics that stir the living blood "like a trumpet call," as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *The Revenge*, but in the main his patriotism is founded on admiration for the great "storied past" of England. Though in youth he triumphs in "the Vision of the world and all the wonder that would be," yet neither in youth nor in age is he himself without some sympathy with a distrust of the new democratic forces which may end in "working their own doom:"

> Step by step we gain'd a freedom known to Europe, known to all,
> Step by step we rose to greatness—thro' the tonguesters we may fall.

(*c*) of Love;

(*c*) Again, in his conception of the passion of Love, and in his portraiture of Womanhood, the same spirit of reverence and self-control animates Tennyson's verse. Love,

in Tennyson, is a pure unselfish passion. Even the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere is described from a spiritual standpoint, in its evil effects rather than in its sensuous details. His highest ideal of love is found in the pure passion of wedded life : true love can exist only under the sanction of Duty and of reverence for womanhood and one's higher self ; and such love is the source of man's loftiest ideas, and inspires his noblest deeds.

(*d*) Lastly, Tennyson's appreciation of Order is illustrated in his treatment of natural scenery. He gives us scenes of savage grandeur, as in (*d*) of Scenery.

> the monstrous ledges slope and spill
> Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,

but he oftener describes still English landscapes, the "homes of ancient peace," with "plaited alleys" and "terrace-lawn," "long, gray fields," "tracts of pasture sunny warm," and all the ordered quiet of rural life.

2. A second great element of Tennyson's character is its noble tone. This pervades every poem he has ever written. His verse is informed with the very spirit of Honour, of Duty, and of Reverence for all that is pure and true. (2) His nobility of thought.

3. Another main characteristic of Tennyson is simplicity. The emotions that he appeals to are generally easy to understand and common to all. He avoids the subtle analysis of character, and the painting of complex motives or of the wild excess of passion. The moral laws which he so strongly upholds are those primary sanctions upon which average English society is founded. A certain Puritan simplicity and a scholarly restraint pervade the mass of his work. (3) His simplicity of emotion.

It is on these foundations of Order, Nobility, and Simplicity that Tennyson's character is built.

II. Tennyson the Poet:

II. Turning now to the matter or substance of his poems, we note, first, that the two chief factors of Tennyson's popularity are that he is a representative English poet, and that he is a consummate Artist.

(1) as Representative of his Age;

In the great spheres of human thought—in religion, in morals, in social life—his poems reflect the complex tendencies of his age and his surroundings. Not, it may be, the most advanced ideas, not the latest speculation, not the transient contentions of the hour; but the broad results of culture and experience upon the poet's English contemporaries. The ground of Tennyson's claim to be considered a representative of his age is seen in the lines of thought pursued in some of those more important poems which deal with the great problems and paramount interests of his times. The poems cover a period of fifty years, and must be considered in the order of their publication. In *Locksley Hall*, published in 1842, the speaker, after giving vent to his own tale of passion and regret, becomes the mouthpiece of the young hopes and aspirations of the Liberalism of the early Victorian era, while in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, the doubts and distrust felt by the Conservatism of our own times find dramatic utterance. *The Princess* deals with a question of lasting interest to society, and one which has of late years risen into more conspicuous importance, the changing position and proper sphere of Woman. In *The Palace of Art* the poet describes and condemns a spirit of æstheticism whose sole religion is the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sakes, and which ignores human

responsibility and obligations to one's fellow-men: while in *St. Simeon Stylites*, the poet equally condemns the evils of a self-centred religious asceticism which despises the active duties of daily life. *The Vision of Sin* is a picture of the perversion of nature and of the final despair which attend the pursuit of sensual pleasure. *The Two Voices* illustrates the introspective self-analysis with which the age discusses the fundamental problem of existence, finding all solutions vain except those dictated by the simplest voices of the conscience and the heart. The poet's great work, *In Memoriam*, is the history of a tender human soul confronted with the stern, relentless order of the Universe and the seeming waste and cruelty of Death. The poem traces the progress of sorrow from the Valley of Death, over-shadowed by the darkness of unspeakable loss, through the regions of philosophic doubt and meditation to the serene heights of resignation and hope, where Faith and Love can triumph over Death in the confident hope of a life beyond, and over Doubt by the realisation

> That all, as in some piece of art,
> Is toil cöoperant to an end.

Maud is dated at the conclusion of that long period of peace which preceded the Crimean War, when the commercial prosperity of England had reached a height unknown before, and when "Britain's sole god" was the millionaire. The poem gives a dramatic rendering of the revolt of a cultured mind against the hypocrisy and corruptions of a society degraded by the worship of Mammon, though the hero inherits a vein of insanity

and speaks too bitterly. The teaching of Tennyson's longest, and in many respects greatest, poem—the spreading mischief of a moral taint—is discussed at length in the Introduction to *The Coming of Arthur and the Passing of Arthur.*[1] Here too Tennyson expresses one of the deepest convictions of his time.

(2) as Artist.

But if Tennyson's popularity is based upon a correspondence between his own reverence for Law and the deepest foundations of English character, it is based no less upon his delicate power as an Artist. Among the elements of this power may be mentioned a minute observation of Nature which furnishes him with a store of poetic description and imagery; a scholarly appreciation of all that is most picturesque in the literature of the past; an exquisite precision in the use of words and phrases; an avoidance of the commonplace; the expressive harmonies of his rhythm, and the subtle melody of his diction.

(*a*) His observation.

(*a*) For minute observation and vivid painting of the details of natural scenery Tennyson is without a rival. We feel that he has seen all that he describes. This may be illustrated by a few examples of his tree-studies :—

> hair
> In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
> Divides three-fold to show the fruit within
> (*The Brook*)

> those eyes
> Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair
> More black than ashbuds in the front of March
> (*The Gardener's Daughter*)

[1] *Macmillan and Co.*

With blasts that blow the poplar white
(*In Memoriam*)

A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime
(*Maud*)

a stump of oak half-dead,
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
Clutch'd at the crag (*The Last Tournament*).

We may also notice the exactness of the epithets in "*perky* larches," "*dry-tongu'd* laurels," "*pillar'd dusk* of *sounding* sycamores," "laburnums, *dropping-wells of fire.*"

Equally exact are his descriptions of scientific phenomena :—

Before the little ducts began
To feed thy bones with lime, and ran
Their course till thou wert also man (*The Two Voices*)

Still, as while Saturn whirls, his steadfast shade
Sleeps on his luminous ring (*The Palace of Art*).

This accurate realisation of scientific facts is often of service in furnishing apt illustrations of moral truths or of emotions of the mind :—

Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears
That grief has shaken into frost (*In Memoriam*)

Prayer, from a living source within the will,
And beating up through all the bitter world,
Like fountains of sweet water in the sea
(*Enoch Arden*).

(*b*) Allusions to the Classics of more than one land may be found in Tennyson. Lines and expressions would seem sometimes to be suggested by the Greek or

(*b*) His scholarship.

Latin poets, and in these the translation is generally so happy a rendering of the original as to give an added grace to what was already beautiful. Illustrations of this characteristic will be found among the Notes at the end of this volume. There is occasionally a reconditeness about these allusions which may puzzle the general reader. For example, in the lines

> And over those ethereal eyes
> The bar of Michael Angelo (*In Memoriam*)

where the reference is to the projection of the frontal bone above the eye-brows noticeable in the portraits of Michael Angelo and of Arthur Hallam, a peculiarity of shape said to indicate strength of character and mental power. Similarly in

> Proxy-wedded with a bootless calf (*The Princess*)

we find an allusion to an old ceremony of marriage by proxy, where an ambassador or agent representing the absent bridegroom, after taking off his boot, placed his leg in the bridal bed.

(*c*) His expressiveness.

(*c*) We may next note Tennyson's unequalled power of finding single words to give at a flash, as it were, an exact picture. What he has written of Virgil's art is equally true of his own, which offers us

> All the charm of all the Muses
> often flowering in a lonely word.

This power of fitting the word to the thought may be seen in the following examples: "*creamy* spray"; "*lily* maid"; "the ripple *washing* in the reeds" and "the

wild water *lapping* on the crag"; "the dying ebb that faintly *lipp'd* the flat red granite"; "as the fiery Sirius *bickers* into red and emerald"; "women *blowz'd* with health and wind and rain."

(*d*) Possessing such a faculty of appropriate expression, the poet naturally avoids the commonplace: Tennyson not only rigidly excludes all otiose epithets and stop-gap phrases, but often, where other writers would use some familiar, well-worn word, he selects one less known but equally true and expressive. He has a distinct fondness for good old Saxon words and expressions, and has helped to rescue many of these from undeserved oblivion. Thus, for the "skinflint" of common parlance he substitutes (in *Walking to the Mail*) the "flayflint" of Ray's *Proverbs;* in place of "blindman's buff" is found the older "hoodman blind" (*In Memoriam*); for "village and cowshed" he writes "thorpe and byre" (*The Victim*), while in *The Brook* the French "cricket" appears as the Saxon "grig." Other examples might be quoted, *e.g.*, *lurdane*, *rathe*, *plash*, *brewis*, *thrall'd*, *boles*, *quitch*, *reckling*, *roky*, *yaffingale*. Occasionally he prefers a word of his own coinage, as *tonguester*, *selfless*. This tendency to avoid the commonplace is noticeable not only in separate words, but in the rendering of ideas, a poetic dress being given to prosaic details by a kind of stately circumlocution: thus in *The Princess* the hero's northern birthplace is indicated by his telling us that "on my cradle shone the Northern star"; and to describe the hour before the planet Venus had sunk into the sea, the poet writes:

(*d*) His avoidance of commonplace.

> Before the crimson-circled star
> Had fall'n into her father's grave.

(*e*) His metrical characteristics.

(*e*) Lastly, if we examine the metrical characteristics of Tennyson's poetry, we observe that the sense of majestic order and gradual development pervading the substance of his poems is not more conspicuous than is the sense of music which governs the style of his versification. He knows all the secrets of harmonious rhythm and melodious diction; he has re-cast and polished his earlier poems with such minute and scrupulous care that he has at length attained a metrical form more perfect than has been reached by any other poet. Several illustrations of the delicacy of his sense of metre are pointed out in the Notes. A few more examples may be here quoted to show how frequently in his verse the sound echoes the sense. This is seen in his Representative Rhythms:

His harmony of rhythm.

(*a*) The first syllable or half-foot of a line of blank verse is often accented and cut off from the rest of the line by a pause, to indicate some sudden emphatic action or startling sight or sound, breaking the flow of the narrative:

his arms
Clash'd: and the sound was good to Gareth's ear
(*Gareth and Lynette*)

Charm'd, till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come (*Ib.*)

Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive
(*Lancelot and Elaine*)

Flash'd, and he call'd, 'I fight upon thy side'
(*Pelleas and Etarre*)

Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf (*Ib.*)

Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave
Drops flat (*The Last Tournament*).

Occasionally the whole first foot is thus cut off:

made his horse
Caracole: then bowed his homage, bluntly saying
(*The Last Tournament*)

Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying: and in the stream beneath him shone
(*Gareth and Lynette*)

(β) Action rapidly repeated is represented by an unusual number of unaccented syllables in one line. Thus we almost hear the rush of waters in such lines as

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn (*The Princess*)

Of some precipitous rivulet to the sea (*Enoch Arden*)

while the rapid warble of song-birds sounds through

Melody on branch and melody in mid-air
(*Gareth and Lynette*).

(γ) Contrast with the above the majestic effect produced by the sustained rhythm and the broad vowel sounds in

By the long wash of Australasian seas (*The Brook*)

The league-long roller thundering on the reef
(*Enoch Arden*).

(δ) Variations from the usual iambic regularity of blank verse, attained by placing the accent on the first instead of the second half-foot, are introduced, often to represent intermittent action, as in

Dówn the lóng tówer stáirs hésitating
(*Lancelot and Elaine*).

His melody of diction.

Tennyson's sense of music is equally conspicuous in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers in the brain, apart from any meaning, as the echoes of a musical cadence linger along a vaulted roof. This is in the main due to his selection of melodious vowels and liquid consonants, and also to his skilful use of alliteration. Examples are everywhere :

> The *m*oan of doves in i*mmemori*a*l elms*,
> And *murmur*ing of innu*mer*ab*l*e bees (*The Princess*)
>
> As 'twere a hund*r*ed *thr*oa*t*ed nigh*t*ingale,
> The strong *t*empes*t*uous *tr*eble *thr*obb'd and palpi*t*a*t*ed
> (*The Vision of Sin*)
>
> The *l*ong *l*ow d*un*ĕ and *l*azy p*lun*ging sea
> (*The Last Tournament*)
>
> *Br*east-high in that *br*ight line of *br*acken stood
> (*Pelleas and Etarre*)
>
> All day the wind breathes *low* with me*llow*er tone
> Through every ho*llow* cave and a*lley l*one
> (*The Lotus Eaters*).

In double words initial alliteration is conspicuous :— "breaker-beaten," "flesh-fall'n," "gloomy-gladed," "lady-laden," "mock-meek," "point-painted," "rain-rotten," "storm-strengthen'd," "tongue-torn," "work-wan." We also find "slowly-mellowing," "hollower-bellowing," "ever-veering," "heavy-shotted hammock-shroud." In no English poet, perhaps only in Homer and Virgil, is this kinship of poetry and music so evident as in Tennyson.

Such is Tennyson, and such his lyric and his narrative poetry. In these lies his strength. His three historical dramas, *Harold*, *Becket*, and *Queen Mary*, are full of deep research and vivid character-painting. *Queen Mary*, *Becket*, *The Cup*, *The Falcon*, *The Promise of May*, and *The Foresters* have been placed on the stage.[1] His lyrical poems, his *In Memoriam*, and his *Idylls*, have become an integral part of the literature of the world, and so long as purity and loftiness of thought expressed in perfect form have power to charm, will remain a possession for ever. Conclusion.

[1] *The Cup* and *The Falcon* were each played during a London season to full houses. G. H. Lewes often said that Tennyson's plays would, if arranged, be preeminently fitted for the stage; and that he was sure the public in the future would not be slow to recognise the many magnificent situations that occur throughout his dramatic works. It is interesting to remember that Robert Browning used to point out the scene of the oath over the saint's bones in *Harold*, as a marvellously actable scene, and that he expressed his admiration of the dramatic qualities of *Queen Mary*.

INTRODUCTION TO IDYLLS OF THE KING.

Cycles of Romance—King Arthur in History—Arthurian Cycle in English Literature—Arthurian Cycle in Tennyson's Poems—The title "Idylls"—Spiritual significance of the *Idylls of the King*—The *Idylls* not a mere Allegory—Anachronism—The ideal Arthur—The *Idylls* completed—Unity of design—Significance of individual Idylls.

Arthurian and Carlovingian Cycles of Romance.

Two great kings, Arthur of England and Charlemagne of France, were made in the middle ages the centres of two great cycles or systems of Romance. Each cycle presented its king as the visible head of Christendom, and arrayed around him a fellowship of knights. The chief of these knights was in each cycle distinguished above his fellows, and made the type of manly valour and chivalric virtue, Lancelot, 'the flower of chivalry' of Arthur's Round Table, corresponding to Orlando (or Roland), the chief of Charlemagne's Paladins: so also Guinevere, 'the pearl of beauty' in Arthur's court, has her counterpart in her whom Milton (*Par. Reg.* iii. 341) calls

> The fairest of her sex, Angelica,
> . . . saught by many prowest knights,
> Both Paynim and the peers of Charlemain.

Common to both cycles are the ideas of far-spreading conquest and of unity of empire under a single head,

Charlemagne's historical annexations being paralleled by a mythical expedition of Arthur, which reached as far as Rome, and brought the capital of the West under his sway. And the career of Charlemagne, like that of Arthur, ends in mystery; as Arthur (according to the legendary epitaph on his tomb at Glastonbury, 'Hic 'jacet Arturus rex quondam rexque futurus') passes 'to come again,' so Charlemagne is described as sitting in Odenberg, crowned and armed, till the time of his second coming to deliver Christendom from Antichrist. The resemblance of the two cycles runs into a number of minor details: in both the chief knight passes through a prolonged term of madness, and even the magic brand *Excalibur* has its match in Charlemagne's famous sword *Durindana*.

Moreover, the moral systems of the two cycles are closely allied. In each

> Shine martial Faith and Courtesy's clear star;

and in each "noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke" (Caxton's Preface to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*). Such difference of teaching as is to be noticed between the two cycles may be due in great part to the different channels through which they have come down to us. Ariosto and Bojardo, the Italian romancists, in whose pages we now read the Carlovingian story, gave the brilliant and vivid colour of their own times, and of the civilization of the later middle age, to the rude material they found

in the early legends. Malory, the compiler of the English *Morte d'Arthur*, brings us into closer and fresher contact with the original form and spirit of the ancient legends. Thus we find that the Romance of the Round Table, far ruder as a work of skill than the Italian presentment of Charlemagne and his Paladins, has more of the simplicity and inconsistency of childhood; the ascetic element is more strongly and quaintly developed; it presents a higher conception of the nature of woman, a more distinct sense of sin, and a broader, more manly view of human life and duty.

King Arthur in History.

The mythical tales that have gathered round the name of Charlemagne deal with a personage whose conquests are matters of authentic history; but regarding Arthur little of real fact has been ascertained; all that modern research can tell us with any certainty is that there was in the sixth century a war-leader in Britain called Artus or Arthur, who, after the departure of the Romans, headed the tribes of Cumbria and Strathclyde (the old divisions of Western Britain, stretching from the Severn to the Clyde) against the encroaching Saxons from the east and the Picts and Scots from the north; and that five or six centuries later "the name of King Arthur had come to stand for an ideal of royal wisdom, chivalric virtue, and knightly prowess which was recognised alike in England, France, and Germany."

The Arthurian Cycle in English Literature.

The Arthurian cycle has afforded materials for many romancists and poets, both English and foreign: its development in English literature may be clearly traced.

The earliest legends of Arthur are to be found in the *Welsh Tales*, in the Breton and German *Romances*, and

in *Chronicles* such as that of St. Gildas de Ruys, *De Excidio Britanniae.*

Between 1130 and 1147 Geoffrey of Monmouth, "the veracious Geoffrey," gave a long account of Arthur's exploits in his *Historia Britonum*, a fabulous Latin chronicle of the Cymry and their kings. The popularity of this History gave a new currency to the stories: Geoffrey's work was turned into French verse by Gaimar, and also, with many additional details about Arthur, by Wace, a Jersey poet. The legends up to this point recounted deeds of mere animal courage and passion.

About 1196 Walter Map (or Mapes), a chaplain to Henry II., and subsequently Archdeacon of Oxford, gave spiritual life to the whole system of Arthurian romance by blending with it the legend of the *Quest of the Holy Graal.* The 'Holy Graal' (or Grail, as Tennyson spells it) was, we are told, the cup or dish used by Christ at the Last Supper, and subsequently by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood of Christ as He was hanging wounded on the cross. The word *grail*, old French *graal*, low Latin *gradale*, is allied to the Greek κρητήρ, a cup. The derivation of *Sancgraal*, from *Sanguis realis* (= the *real blood* of Christ), is erroneous, and arose from a wrong spelling and division of letters, *sancgraal* being mistakenly written *san grael*, and then *sang real.* Joseph brought the dish with him to Glastonbury, in England, where it was lost;* the search for it, the

* There is still preserved in the cathedral of Genoa a hexagonal dish, of the colour and brilliance of emerald; it is called *Sacro Catino*, and local traditions maintain that this is the original *grail.*

'Quest of the Holy Grail,' was undertaken by many of the knights of the Round Table, and to some of them a sight of it, accompanied by the holy sacrament and the Real Presence of Christ, was granted. The legend thus became an allegory of a man's striving after a perfect knowledge of Truth and of God, to be gained only by a life of ideal purity. (See Tennyson's Idyll of *The Holy Grail.*) From the introduction of the Grail legend we must date the elevation of King Arthur to the place he has since held as a Christian monarch ruling over an essentially religious people.

In 1470 Sir Thomas Malory (or 'Malleor,' as Tennyson calls him) used the materials he found in "many noble volumes; . . in Welsh be many and also in French and some in English" for the making of his "book of King Arthur and of his noble knights of the Round Table." The book is called by Caxton, who printed it in 1485, "thys noble and Joyous book entytled le Morte Darthur"; and in his preface thereto the printer says that it contains "many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalry." Malory's book is for the modern reader the most accessible and best known storehouse of Arthurian legend. Upon this Tennyson has founded some of his *Idylls of the King.* The closeness with which the poet has in many instances followed his original is illustrated by the parallel passages quoted from Malory in the Notes at the end of this volume.

Other poets have taken, or thought of taking, Arthur as the central hero of their chief work. Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene,* makes 'Prince Arthure' the type of 'magnificence,' *i.e.* 'noble doing'; and under the figure

of Arthure's knights represents the various virtues striving heavenwards and helped on their way by their Prince.

Milton originally intended to take as the heroes of a great national epic—

> indigenas reges . . .
> Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,

but, sharing the common doubt of most writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as to "who he was and whether any such reigned in history," rejected the *Round Table* as a subject in favour of the Loss of Paradise.

Blackmore wrote two epics—*Prince Arthur*, in ten books, and *King Arthur*, in twelve books.

Dryden produced a dramatic opera which he entitled *King Arthur*, but it was really nothing more than an allegory of the events of the reign of Charles II. In his *Essay on Satire* he gives a melancholy account of a projected epic, with either King Arthur or Edward the Black Prince as hero. In allusion to these writers, Sir Walter Scott, in his *Introduction to Marmion*, tells how the "mightiest chiefs of British song" felt the fascination of the Arthurian legends—

> They gleam through Spenser's elfin dream,
> And mix in Milton's heavenly theme;
> And Dryden, in immortal strain,
> Had raised the Table Round again,
> But that a ribald king and court
> Bade him toil on to make them sport.

Scott himself felt a similar attraction towards this "ancient minstrel strain." He edited, with notes, Thomas the Rhymer's metrical romance, *Sir Tristrem*,

and introduced into his own *Bridal of Triermaine* a story of King Arthur's love for a fairy princess.

In 1838 Lady Charlotte Guest published *The Mabinogion*, a translation into English of the Welsh legends contained in "the red book of Hergerst," which is in the library of Jesus College, Oxford. From the *Mabinogion* Tennyson has taken the story of his Idyll of *Geraint and Enid*.

In 1848 Bulwer-Lytton produced an epic, in six-lined stanzas, entitled *King Arthur*.

The Arthurian Cycle in Tennyson's Poems.

On Tennyson the Arthurian Romance began, very early in his life, to exercise a strong fascination. We are told that, when quite a boy, he chanced upon a copy of Malory's book, and often with his brothers held mimic tournaments after the fashion of knights of the Round Table. So early as 1832 he published *The Lady of Shalott*, the incidents of which afterwards formed the framework of the Idyll of *Elaine*. Ten years later his *Morte d'Arthur* appeared; an introduction to this poem represented it as a fragment of a long epic, all the rest of which, as being "faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth," the author had thrown into the fire. Five years previously to this publication Walter Savage Landor, who had heard the *Morte d'Arthur* read aloud from manuscript, wrote: "It is more Homeric than any poem of our time, and rivals some of the noblest poetry in the Odyssea." Two shorter Arthurian poems, *Sir Galahad* and *Lancelot and Guinevere*, were contained in the same volume with *Morte d'Arthur*. The first issue of *Idylls of the King*, comprising only four Idylls—*Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*—appeared in 1859. The remaining Idylls were published at intervals between 1869 and 1872, with the exception of *Balin and Balan*,

'an introduction to *Merlin and Vivien*,' contained with other poems in a volume given to the world in 1885. The original fragment, *Morte d'Arthur*, now forms part of the last Idyll, *The Passing of Arthur*.

The title "Idylls."

'Idyll,' from εἶδος, εἰδύλλιον, 'a little picture,' was the title originally used in Greek Literature for short picturesque poems, such as the Idylls of Theocritus the Sicilian (B.C. 280); these generally depict common incidents in the life of simple folk in country or in town—the loves and jealousies of shepherds, the toils of fishermen, or sight-seeings in a great city. Later imitators of Theocritus (Vergil, for example) took rural life almost exclusively as the scenery of their Idylls: hence 'idyllic' is now generally understood as implying an idealised rusticity, the simplicity of the country without its coarseness. So Tennyson calls the shepherd love-song, quoted by Ida in *The Princess*, "a small sweet idyl,"[1] and has given the title of "English Idylls" to poems like his *Dora*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, and *Sea Dreams*. But the term 'Idyll' may rightly be used of any 'picture poem,' that is, a poem which gives a highly-wrought and complete representation of any scene of life and has for motive one leading sentiment. The *Idylls of the King* are not pastoral poems: they are of a loftier and nobler strain and are informed with a more serious purpose. Each *Idyll* is complete in itself as presenting a separate picture, but each at the same time fills its place in a con-

[1] The old spelling was *idyl*, with one *l*. The double *l*, which better recalls the Greek original, served when first adopted to distinguish heroic descriptive poems from pastorals like those of Theocritus. This distinction is no longer observed, the modern spelling *idyll* being in general use.

nected series grouped round a central figure. The twelve books of the *Idylls of the King* form one great Poem, characterised by Epic unity of design and grandeur of tone: they present a full cycle of heroic story and have a rightful claim to be known as the "Epic of Arthur."

The spiritual significance of the *Idylls of the King*.

The spiritual significance which is seen to be so "deeply interfused" through this great poem, now that it can be studied as a completed work of art, was naturally not so evident in the detached instalments first published. They were regarded as "rich pictorial fancies taken, certainly not at random, but without any really coherent design, out of a great magazine of romantic story" (Hutton, *Literary Essays*), and were read with delight for their "exquisite magnificence of style," as Swinburne calls it, the elaborate melody of rhythm, the richness and truth of illustration, and the grandeur of tone that marked them. And, indeed, apart from any secondary significance which they are meant to contain, the lover of poetry and romance will always feel the intrinsic charm both in the form and in the substance of these tales of "wonder and woe, of amorous devotion and fierce conflict and celestial vision." It is for the story and the style that each Idyll should first be read; their 'moral' is best reserved for separate, subsequent consideration. Accordingly, the reader of this volume has in the Notes been referred to this Introduction for explanation of any significance deeper than that which is evident on the surface of the poems. This significance is never obtruded by the poet, and it is only in his epilogue *To the Queen* that he tells us of the grand moral purpose which is now recognised as clearly

and consistently running through the whole set of Idylls. He there describes the work as—

> . . . an old imperfect tale,
> New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
> Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
> Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
> Touch'd by the adultrous finger of a time
> That hover'd between war and wantonness,
> And crownings and dethronements.

The King Arthur of the *Idylls* is something more than a model of kingly virtue and knightly prowess, and the story of the founding and the dissolution of the Round Table is not solely a narrative of romantic adventure, and of the loves, the passions, and the sins of knights and ladies. These Idylls reflect the eternal struggle in the life of mankind of good against evil, of the spiritual against the sensual element of our nature; that conflict which St. Paul (Bible, *Rom.* vii. 13) describes as the law in our members warring against the law of our mind. A personal friend of the poet's, Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, daughter of Thackeray, himself also an intimate friend of Tennyson's, has written as follows regarding the scope of the *Idylls*: "If *In Memoriam* is the record of a human soul, the *Idylls* mean the history, not of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle, of the faith of a nation failing and falling away into darkness. 'It is the dream of man coming into practical life, and ruined by one sin.' Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the table-land of life, and its struggle and performance." The *Idylls* them-

selves are not devoid of definite, outspoken testimony to their own inner meaning. In *Guinevere* Arthur himself recounts how on founding the Order of the Round Table he made his knights swear

> "To reverence the king, as if he were
> Their conscience, and their conscience as their king,"

and later in the same Idyll the repentant queen, recognizing at last the height of Arthur's purity, cries

> "Ah, great and gentle lord
> Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
> Among his warring senses, to thy knights."

The *Idylls* not a mere allegory.

Yet the poem is not a mere allegory. Arthur and his knights and the ladies of his court are not abstractions of ideal qualities: they are real men and women, with human feelings and trials and conflicts: they do represent and embody certain virtues and vices, but these qualities work and live in their work and their lives. Some purely allegorical figures are, indeed, introduced, as that of the Lady of the Lake personifying Religion; and in the visions of Percival in *The Holy Grail* there is more of symbolism than reality. But these figures and visions are clearly distinct from the human *personæ* of the stories.

Arthur, then, is a man in whom the higher instincts of his nature dominate the lower, and whose whole life is governed by the law within. He is, as Guinevere too late acknowledges, "the highest and most human too." The kingdom which "for a space" he establishes, and which in spite of downfall he will come to establish again, is the rule of conscience; and in his coming, his

foundation of the Round Table "for love of God and men," his continued endeavour to keep his knights true to their vows, his failure, and his mysterious passing which is not death, we see a reflection of the conflict eternally waged in human life between the spirit and the flesh "with the lusts thereof." Arthur's visible enemies are the heathen, whom he overcomes; but more subtle foes than the heathen are the evil passions and the mystic delusions of his own Christian court and household, which in the end prevail over and ruin his "boundless purpose."

Anachronism in the setting of the story in Malory and in Tennyson.

Tennyson's disavowal of an historical intention such as is characteristic of the true Epic, has been quoted above. Indeed, the legends themselves, as read in Malory's book, make no pretence to chronological truth: even Malory's setting of the stories belongs to times near his own rather than to the times which he tells of, to the age of chivalry and the Crusades rather than to the rude simplicity of the real Arthur's era, to the twelfth rather than to the sixth century. The author of the *Idylls* in his turn has gone still further, and while preserving from Malory the scenic accessories of tilt and tournament and heraldic device, as well as the chivalric virtues of courtesy and reverence for womanhood, has placed the court of Arthur in a mental and moral atmosphere not far remote from that in which the poet's own contemporaries move. As the pomp and circumstance and the refinement of chivalry in Malory's compilation are foreign to the times of the ancient British war-leader, so the self-questioning of Tristram and the philosophies of Dagonet, for example, in *The Last Tournament*, are a development quite beyond the purview of Malory's times.

Tennyson has taken the dim personages of the early annals, surrounded as he found them in Malory by the romantic glamour and mysticism of a later age, and has idealised them still further to suit his own poetic purpose and the advanced thought of the nineteenth century.

The ideal Arthur an original conception of the old chroniclers.

It must not, however, be forgotten that the idea of Arthur as a type of half-divine manhood and supreme kingliness is no invention of Tennyson's. "Flos Regum Arturus," Arthur the Flower of Kings, the motto prefixed to the *Idylls*, is a phrase from the old chronicler, Joseph of Exeter, who also writes, "The old world knows not his peer, nor will the future show us his equal: he alone towers over all other kings, better than the past ones, and greater than those that are to be." Caxton, in his preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, uses similar language: "For in all places, Christian and heathen, he is taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian men." This halo of spiritual glory is, both in the Chronicles and in Malory's book, crossed and blurred by sin and shame; but such a stigma is inconsistent with the ideal perfection also ascribed to Arthur's character, and even in Malory's presentment it leaves no taint on the king's later career. After the elevation of the older stories, by the blending with them of the Christian mysticism of the Sangraal legends, the unearthly excellence of the king is the stronger element, and over-rules the admixture of crime and retribution.

Tennyson's development of the ideal character of Arthur.

It is this view of Arthur that Tennyson has adopted; and it was necessary to reject the inconsistent evil before any coherent design of the character could be formed for

the purpose of a modern Arthuriad. The "pure severity of perfect light" in which the faultless king of Tennyson's *Idylls* moves, as in his proper element, is the natural development of the loftier spirit infused in the tenth century into the old Chroniclers' conception of Arthur's character: the new leaven was bound to work until it had leavened the whole lump.

The *Idylls* in their complete form.

The *Idylls of the King* as now published comprise the *Dedication* to the Prince Consort

Hereafter through all times Albert the Good—

—*The Coming of Arthur*—ten Idylls grouped together under the general title of *The Round Table*—*The Passing of Arthur* and an epilogue *To the Queen*. The first Idyll and the last are thus separated from the ten intermediate poems, and deal, the one with the birth of Arthur and his founding of the great Order, and the other with the king's last battle and his passing from earth. They thus differ in subject from the Idylls treating of Arthur's knights and the ladies of his court, and this difference is marked in their style, which is intentionally archaic.

Unity of design of the *Idylls*.

Yet the unity of design of the whole series of *Idylls* clearly appears: it is seen not only in the gradually developed story of one great sin and its spreading taint, but also in incidental features. Thus the story in its course runs through the seasons of one complete year, the phases of Nature in their succession forming a background for the successive scenes of the poem. In *The Coming of Arthur* we read that it was on the "night of the new year" that Arthur was born. Gareth, in the next Idyll, starts on his quest of glory at the dawn of a

spring morning; the melody of birds sounds around him, and under foot

> The live green had kindled into flowers,
> For it was past the time of Easterday.

The marriage of Arthur and Guinevere (described in *The Coming of Arthur*) takes place amid the flowers in May. In *The Marriage of Geraint* and its continuation, *Geraint and Enid*, the action of the characters begins "on a summer morn," and later in the poem we come to the mowers at work, while the sun blazes on the turning scythe. Summer is further advanced in *Balin and Balan* and in *Merlin and Vivien*: at the outset Merlin, as he crosses the fields, is "foot-gilt" with "blossom-dust," and in the concluding scene a summer tempest breaks overhead. In *Lancelot and Elaine* the blossoming meadow has given place to a field that "shone full-summer," and we read of "the casement standing wide for heat." The summer is not yet past in the next two Idylls: it is "on a summer night" that the vision of the Holy Grail appears to the assembled knights. *Pelleas and Etarre* is the last of the summer Idylls: the sun beats "like a strong man" on the young knight's helm, and, later, we have the mellow moon and the roses of the waning season. In *The Last Tournament* autumn, with its "yellowing woods" and "withered leaf," succeeds, and the scene closes "all in a death-dumb, autumn-dripping gloom." The last of the *Round Table* Idylls shows us Guinevere's flight at a time when the white mist of early winter clings to the dead earth. And, finally, the last weird battle in *The Passing of Arthur* is fought

> when the great light of heaven
> Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year.

The wounded king is carried at midnight across rocks covered with the ice of the dead of winter; and he passes away from earth when the mystic year has rolled full circle. The "new Sun" now rises to usher in a "new year," and a different era:

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new.

Spiritual significance of *The Coming of Arthur*.

The more particular significance of the incidents and characters in the first Idyll, *The Coming of Arthur*, may now be considered. The mystery of Arthur's birth points to the searchings of heart, the difficulties, and the doubts which ever accompany any human conception of the origin of spiritual authority and of duty; and the different views taken of that mystery aptly represent the varieties of soil upon which the seed of any new gospel must fall. Some will always be found who talk and act in direct opposition to him who would lead them to higher things, and to say, as the scribes of Jerusalem said of Christ, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils":—

> For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
> Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet
> And theirs are bestial, call him less than man.

In contrast with such base-minded foes we have the dreamy belief of the spiritually-minded mystic—

> And there be those who deem him more than man,
> And dream him dropp'd from heaven,

—for the mystic is always "seeking for a sign," and prone to look for the immediate interposition of supernatural agency.

Another class of minds, which may be placed midway between the base opponents and the mystic believers, is

represented by Bedivere. This honest knight troubles himself but little with doubts or portents, and sees no reason to question or prove the truth of a message which comes to him with the sanction of common sense and at the same time satisfies his own ideal. His recognition of the significance of the message and its higher aspects may be dim and partial, but his obedience is thorough and practical. To this class also Bellicent belongs: although, woman-like, she feels a curiosity which she asks Merlin to satisfy regarding the reported wonders of

> The shining dragon and the naked child,

yet speaking of the king to her son she says that she

> doubted him
> No more than he himself.

In the Coronation scene many of the details have a distinctly symbolic reference. The "three fair queens," with the light from the pictured cross falling upon them, probably typify the three Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity. Mage Merlin, "who knew the range of all their arts," may aptly symbolize the Intellect: his knowledge ranges over all human philosophy, but, as his fate, described in *Merlin and Vivien*, shows, it is knowledge without moral restraint or spiritual strength.

The Lady of the Lake, who stands near Merlin, "knows a subtler magic than his own," inasmuch as the power of Religion* is based on deeper and stronger

* In the Idyll of *Gareth and Lynette* a description is given of a statue of the Lady of the Lake, standing on the keystone of a gate of Camelot: the figure is embellished with many Christian emblems: its arms are stretched out like a cross, drops of baptismal water flow from its hands, from which also hang a censer and a sword, and the "sacred fish" floats on its breast. The last

foundations than those of any philosophy that science can teach. She is clothed in white, the colour of purity: incense, the emblem of adoration, curls about her: her face is half hidden in the "dim religious light" of the holy place: her voice mingles with the hymns and, like the voice of the great multitude saying Alleluia, heard by St. John in the Revelation, sounds "as the voice of many waters": her dwelling is in eternal calm, where storms cannot reach her: and as our Lord walked on the Galilean waves and stilled their tumult, she can pass over the troubled waters of life and calm them with her footsteps.

The sword which she gives to Arthur is cross-hilted: see Note to *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 285. It is the "sword of the spirit," to be used against the superstitions and falsehoods of heathendom. Its jewelled ornament, like the Urim and Thummim of the Jewish high priest, is emblematic of mystic help and guidance from a heavenly source.

The inner significance of the poem is further illustrated by Merlin's riddling response to Bellicent's question and by Leodogran's dream about Arthur, both of which are treated of in the Notes: also by the "dark sayings from of old," which speak of the king; these represent the vague oracular forecasts which, after the advent of any of the world's great teachers, are often said to have gone before it.

emblem was one in use among the early Christians: noticing that the initial letters of the phrase, Ἰησους Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱος Σωτήρ, formed the word ΙΧΘΥΣ, fish, they adopted the word and the form of a fish as Christian symbols. These may be seen cut on tombs in the Catacombs of Rome.

Spiritual significance of the "Round Table" *Idylls.*

Before proceeding to the secondary significance of *The Passing of Arthur*, it will be convenient to trace the development of the design of the poem through the intermediate group of Idylls.

In *Gareth and Lynette* the golden age of Arthur's reign is depicted, before the taint of moral poison in the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere has begun to be felt. The vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, utter faithfulness in love, and uttermost obedience to the king are loyally kept by the whole Order, and true chivalry flourishes in all its splendour. Gareth himself is full of the enthusiasm of youth and of eagerness to serve the true king, willing to accept the humblest duty for the sake of glory. His achievement, the deliverance of the captive of Castle Perilous, is something more than a specimen of the work of the Round Table in redressing human wrong: it is also an image in miniature of the "boundless purpose of the king," the deliverance of the soul from bondage to the flesh.

In *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, which were originally printed as one Idyll, the taint of impurity first shows itself; suspicions of his wife's honour are bred in Geraint's mind by rumours of the queen's unfaithfulness.

In *Balin and Balan*, these rumours have gained greater currency and strength, and the final catastrophe, the death of the two brothers, is due to the shattering of their faith in Guinevere's purity.

The taint comes into clearer light in *Merlin and Vivien*. The "vast wit and hundred winters" of the great Enchanter, shrewdness and knowledge and long experience, unsupported by moral strength, are powerless to with-

stand the seductions of fleshly lusts. In these four Idylls the seeds of sin are sown.

In the next, *Lancelot and Elaine*, the bitter fruit ripens: the death of Elaine, the "simple heart and sweet," is directly due to Lancelot's false truth to his guilty passion for the queen.

In *The Holy Grail* a new element of failure is introduced: the knights, misled by vague dreams and mystic enthusiasm, desert the plain and practical duties of common life to "follow wandering fires," and true faith is lost in the delusions of superstition.

Pelleas and Etarre shows us the pure and loyal trust of a young life turned to bitterness and despair by sad experience of the prevailing corruption.

The triumph of the senses is complete in *The Last Tournament:* Tristram, the victor in "The Tournament of the Dead Innocence," openly scoffs at the king and his vows, and the glory of the Round Table is no more: one faithful follower is left to Arthur, and he is the court fool.

In *Guinevere* we see that sin has done its work, and the smouldering scandal breaks and blazes before the people: the Order is splintered into feuds, the realm falls to ruin, and Arthur goes forth to meet his mysterious doom.

Spiritual significance of *The Passing of Arthur.*

The concluding Idyll, *The Passing of Arthur*, tells of the last battle and the end of Arthur's earthly life. The king's "sensuous frame is racked with pangs that conquer trust," but there is no lessening of fortitude, no weakening of will—

> "Nay, God, my Christ, I pass but cannot die."

In the conflict that precedes the last dread hour confusion and "formless fear" may fall upon the soul

when it stands forlorn amid the wrecks of its lofty purposes, and prepares to face the unknown future. But though Arthur sees full well the failure of all the purposes of his throne, his faith is not shaken: he can still say

"King am I, whatsoever be their cry,"

and the last stroke with Excalibur, which slays a traitor, fitly crowns a life of kingly and knightly achievement. The lines which follow, from

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd,

down to

And on the mere the wailing died away,

formed the original fragment *Morte d'Arthur*. The symbolism in this portion of the Idyll is less prominent, and the story is told with Homeric simplicity and directness. Excalibur, when now no use remains for it on earth, is reclaimed by the Lady of the Lake, that it may equip the king in other regions; for the life and energy of the soul do not end when it passes from earth. The cries of triumphant acclaim, sounding from beyond the limit of the world, to welcome the wounded king to his isle of rest and healing, recall Leodogran's vision of the king standing crowned in heaven. Arthur's earthly realm may "reel back into the beast," and his Round Table may be dissolved; but his purity is untarnished, his honour is without stain, and the ideal which he has striven to realize has lost none of its inward vitality and significance. As he passes from earth to "vanish into light," he already gives a forecast of his return as the representative of the new chivalry, when he shall come

With all good things, and war shall be no more.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

AND

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear

Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallow'd in the gardens of the King.
And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human sucklings ; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,
And Cæsar's eagle : then his brother king,
Urien, assail'd him : last a heathen horde,
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

But—for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,
Tho' not without an uproar made by those
Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son'—the King
Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou !
For here between the man and beast we die.'

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call, and came : and Guinevere
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass ;
But since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,
But rode a simple knight among his knights,
And many of these in richer arms than he,
She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,
One among many, tho' his face was bare.
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd

His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen ; after, slew the beast, and fell'd
The forest, letting in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight
And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
Flash'd forth and into war : for most of these,
Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,
Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he
That he should rule us ? who hath proven him
King Uther's son ? for lo ! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King ;
This is the son of Anton, not the King.'

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere ;
And thinking as he rode, 'Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
Up to my throne, and side by side with me ?
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me,
Vext with waste dreams ? for saving I be join'd
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
Then might we live together as one life,

And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.'

Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale—
When Arthur reach'd a field-of-battle bright
With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
So when the King had set his banner broad,
At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
And now the Barons and the kings prevail'd,
And now the King, as here and there that war
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
And mightier of his hands with every blow,
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings
Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
To one who sins, and deems himself alone
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands
That hack'd among the flyers, 'Ho! they yield!'
So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King,

So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day.'
'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field :
I know thee for my King !' Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man :
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
Debating—'How should I that am a king,
However much he holp me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son ?'—lifted his voice, and call'd
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
He trusted all things, and of him required
His counsel : 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth ?'

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,
'Sir King, there are but two old men that know :
And each is twice as old as I ; and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served
King Uther thro' his magic art ; and one
Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,
Who taught him magic ; but the scholar ran
Before the master, and so far, that Bleys
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth.'

To whom the King Leodogran replied,
'O friend, had I been holpen half as well
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
Then beast and man had had their share of me:
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.'

Then, when they came before him, the King said,
'I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase: but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?'

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, 'Ay.'
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—
For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King—

'Sir, there be many rumours on this head:
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man:
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief
In all this matter—so ye care to learn—
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne:
And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved
To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne.

And Uther cast upon her eyes of love :
But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,
So loathed the bright dishonour of his love,
That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war :
And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,
And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness : afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time,
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come ; because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
Piecemeal among them, had they known ; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake
Of Gorloïs. Wherefore Merlin took the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
And ancient friend of Uther ; and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own ;
And no man knew. And ever since the lords
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,
So that the realm has gone to wrack : but now,
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)

Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir, your king,"
A hundred voices cried, "Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorloïs he,
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin thro' his craft,
And while the people clamour'd for a king,
Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war.'

Then while the King debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorloïs, after death,
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

'A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king—
So many those that hate him, and so strong,
So few his knights, however brave they be—
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?'

'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee: few,
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
For I was near him when the savage yells
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
Crown'd on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
"Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee." Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,

Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

'But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King:
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross
And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

'And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

'And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own—
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

'There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur row'd across and took it—rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it—on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
"Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
"Cast me away!" And sad was Arthur's face
Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him,
"Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off." So this great brand the king
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.'

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask'd,
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
'The swallow and the swift are near akin,
But thou art closer to this noble prince,
Being his own dear sister;' and she said,
'Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I;'
'And therefore Arthur's sister?' ask'd the King.
She answer'd, 'These be secret things,' and sign'd
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.
And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard; the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, 'What know I?
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark

Was Gorloïs, yea and dark was Uther too,
Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.
Moreover, always in my mind I hear
A cry from out the dawning of my life,
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
"O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world."'

'Ay,' said the King, 'and hear ye such a cry?
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?'

'O King!' she cried, 'and I will tell thee true:
He found me first when yet a little maid:
Beaten I had been for a little fault
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
And hated this fair world and all therein,
And wept, and wish'd that I were dead; and he—
I know not whether of himself he came,
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side,
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
And dried my tears, being a child with me.
And many a time he came, and evermore
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad
At times he seem'd, and sad with him was I,
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
And now of late I see him less and less,
But those first days had golden hours for me,
For then I surely thought he would be king.

'But let me tell thee now another tale:
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,

To hear him speak before he left his life.
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
And when I enter'd told me that himself
And Merlin ever served about the King,
Uther, before he died; and on the night
When Uther in Tintagil past away
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
Descending thro' the dismal night—a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost—
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!" And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter follow'd calm,
Free sky and stars: "And this same child," he said,
"Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace
Till this were told." And saying this the seer
Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,
Not ever to be question'd any more
Save on the further side; but when I met

Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth—
The shining dragon and the naked child
Descending in the glory of the seas—
He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me
In riddling triplets of old time, and said :

'"Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !
A young man will be wiser by and by ;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.
Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !
And truth is this to me, and that to thee ;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.
Rain, sun, and rain ! and the free blossom blows :
Sun, rain, and sun ! and where is he who knows ?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

'So Merlin riddling anger'd me ; but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only child,
Guinevere : so great bards of him will sing
Hereafter ; and dark sayings from of old
Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,
And echo'd by old folk beside their fires
For comfort after their wage-work is done,
Speak of the King ; and Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him that he will not die,
But pass, again to come ; and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king.'

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing 'Shall I answer yea or nay ?'
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,

Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, 'No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;'
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen;—and watch'd him from the gates:
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
(For then was latter April) and return'd
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,
The sacred altar blossom'd white with May,
The Sun of May descended on their King,
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
Roll'd incense, and there past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two

Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love :
And Arthur said, 'Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death !'
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
'King and my lord, I love thee to the death !'
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,
'Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
And all this Order of thy Table Round
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King !'

So Dubric said ; but when they left the shrine
Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,
In scornful stillness gazing as they past ;
Then while they paced a city all on fire
With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King :—

'Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May ;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away !
Blow thro' the living world—"Let the King reign."

'Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm ?
Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

'Strike for the King and live ! his knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand ! Let the King reign.

'Blow trumpet ! he will lift us from the dust.
Blow trumpet ! live the strength and die the lust !
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

'Strike for the King and die ! and if thou diest,
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign.

'Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

'The King will follow Christ, and we the King
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.'

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,
Strode in, and claim'd their tribute as of yore.
But Arthur spake, 'Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay:' so those great lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King
Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

'I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;

And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere the last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlight haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd,
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;

And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse—
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,

On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field

Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.'

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,

Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry ;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man : then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin ; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land :
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again

To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known :
But now delay not : take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere :
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man ;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,

Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fëalty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,

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Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems

Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,

Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst—if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow.
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, 'The King is gone.'
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
'He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,

They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

NOTES.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.

Notes.

1. **Leodogran, the King of Cameliard.** These names are variously spelt Leodegraunce, Leodegan, Lodegrean, and Camelud, Camelyarde, Camelyard, Cameliard in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and other minor legendary works. A note in Wright's edition of Malory says, "Cameliard is apparently the district called *Carmelide* in the English metrical romance of *Merlin*, on the border of which was a town called Breckenho (? Brecknock). Further on in the same poem the capital of Carmelide is said to be Carohaise."

4. **Guinevere ... delight.** Scan

Guíne|vére, and | in hér | his óne | delíght|.

The pause after the word 'Guinevere' gives emphasis to the name and importance to the character. Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *History of the Britons* spells the name Guanhumara, and states that the lady was "descended from a noble family of Romans, and educated under Duke Cador of Cornwall, and surpassed in beauty all the women of the island." The following spellings of the name are also found—Guenhara, Genure, Gwenhwyfar, Gaynor, Guenever, and Guinever.

5. **For many a petty king.** Geoffrey of Monmouth gives accounts of the reigns of Brutus (grandson of Ascanius) and his three sons, Locrine, Albanach, and Camber; Leir, Belinus (brother of Brennus, the conqueror of Rome), Cassibelaunus, Arviragus, Lucius, Basianus, Carassius, Asclepiodotus, Coel, Octavius, Maximianus, Constantine, Vortigern, and Constantine's sons Aurelius, Ambrosius, and Uther.

13. **For first Aurelius ... died.** The reign of Aurelius (called 'Aurelius Emrys' in *Gareth and Lynette*) occupies the fifth

book of Geoffrey's Chronicle. After defeating Vortigern he conquers the Saxons, beheads Hengist, and, by Merlin's aid, transports the great stones called 'The Giant's Dance' from Kildare in Ireland to Salisbury Plain, where he erects them as a monument to the British chiefs slain by Hengist. Finally he is poisoned by a Saxon. At his death there appears a wonderful comet, from which issue two long and brilliant rays, together with a fairy form much resembling a dragon.

14. **And after him King Uther.** The sixth book of the Chronicle contains the reign of Uther. His first act after his election to the crown is to cause two golden dragons to be made in imitation of that which he had seen in Uther's comet's tail; one of these he solemnly offers up in the church at Winchester, and takes the other as the royal standard; whence he was afterwards called Pen-Dragon or Dragon's head. [See the description in *Guinevere* of Arthur's crest, "The Dragon of the great Pendragonship."] After conquering revolters in the northern provinces, Uther goes round all the Scottish nations, and reclaims that rebellious people from their ferocity. He then overcomes Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, and marries his widow, Igerna. After other battles, he is poisoned by the Saxons, and buried at Stonehenge near his brother Aurelius.

16. **for a space.** A hint is given in these words of the failure which in the end is to overtake the work of Arthur's life.

17. Malory's words are, "But within few yeares after King Arthur wonne all the North, Scotland and all that were under their obeysance. Also a part of Wales held against King Arthur, but hee overcame them all, as hee did the remnant, and all through the noble prowesse of himselfe and his knights of the Round Table." **Table Round**, the order of knighthood established by King Arthur. It took its name from a large round table at which the king and his knights sat for meals. Such a table is still preserved at Winchester as having belonged to King Arthur. Some accounts say that there were 150 seats at the table, and that it was originally constructed to imitate the shape of the world, which long after Arthur's time was supposed to be flat and circular in form; see *Guinevere*:—

> "But I was first of all the kings who drew
> The knighthood errant of this realm and all
> The realms together under me, their Head,
> In that fair Order of my Table Round,
> A glorious Company, the flower of men
> To serve as model for the mighty world
> And be the fair beginning of a time"—

We are further told that this table was originally constructed by Merlin, the wizard, for Uther Pendragon, who presented it to Leodogran, but that on Arthur's marriage with Leodogran's

daughter, the table and 100 knights with it were sent to Arthur with Guinevere as a wedding gift that should please him more than a grant of land. One of the seats was called the *Siege* (*i.e.* seat) *Perilous* [see *The Last Tournament*] because it swallowed up any unchaste person who sat in it. Galahad the Pure was the only knight who could occupy it with safety. Other accounts say that the Round Table was constructed in imitation of the table used by Christ and His disciples at the Last Supper; that it contained 13 seats, and that the seat originally occupied by Christ was always empty except when occupied by the Holy Grail. Other Kings and Princes besides Arthur had Round Tables. In the reign of Edward I. Roger de Mortimer established a Round Table for the furtherance of warlike pastimes, and King Edward III. is said to have done the same. 'To hold a Round Table' came to mean little more than to hold a tournament.

The knights of the Round Table whose deeds are told in *The Idylls of the King*, are—

Bedivere....“First made and latest left of all the knights;”
Lancelot....“His warrior whom he lov'd and honour'd most;”
**Gawain*. ...“A reckless and irreverent knight was he;”
**Modred*. ...“Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom;”
**Gareth*. ...“Underwent the sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;”
Kay. .....“No mellow master of the meats and drinks;”
Geraint. ...“A tributary prince of Devon;” married to Enid;
Balin. .....“The Savage;” and *Balan*, his brother; [Pure;”
Percival. ...“Whom Arthur and his knighthood call'd The
Galahad....“But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail;”
Bors. .....“A square-set man and honest;” of Lancelot's kin;
Pelleas. ...“Of the Isles;” enamoured of Etarre;
Tristram....“Of the Woods;” slain by Mark, Isolt's husband.
Also *Ulfius*, *Brastias*, *Valence*, and *Sagramore*.

24. **rooted**, grubbed up by the roots the corn, etc.

26. **the wolf** ... **devour**, a common occurrence to this day in parts of India.

28. **lent** ... **four feet.** Many authentic records of wolf-reared children in comparatively modern times are to be found. A good account of a half-wild boy, captured in a wolf's den, is given in Dr. Ball's *Jungle Life in India*, where the description of the boy's habits tallies with that given in the text of the habits of his forerunners in Cameliarde. Cf. the tale of Romulus and Remus and the ancient belief in the existence of the were-wolf, or *loup-garou*, a bogie, half-man, half-wolf, that devoured children. Giraldus Cambrensis tells us that Irishmen can “change into wolves.”

*Sons of Lot and Bellicent, and so called Arthur's nephews.

32. **wolf-like men.** Cf. *Geraint and Enid*, of bandit knights :—

"Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born
The three gay suits of armour which they wore."

31. **mock ... four feet**, go on all fours like the wolf that had suckled them.

34. **Groan'd for**, eagerly longed for.

35. **his brother king, Urien**, called 'Rion' in *Merlin* and 'Uryence' or 'Ryence, king of North Wales' by Malory.

36. **a heathen horde**, called Saracens in *Merlin* and by Malory; in reality they were perhaps Norsemen, "the heathen of the Northern Sea" (*Geraint and Enid*) and Saxons.

38. **And on the spike ... amazed.** Notice the alliteration ; the dominant letters are *sp*, *k*, and *t* ; all sharp, hard sounds.

43. **He is not Uther's son.** For the reason of these doubts, see below.

54. **tho' his face was bare**, *i.e.* his visor, the face-piece of his helmet, was raised. A hint is, perhaps, here given that Guinevere ought to have instinctively known at sight of Arthur's face that he was God's 'highest creature here'; but, as she says of herself, in the Idyll that bears her name, her

"false voluptuous pride, that took
Too easily impressions from below,
Would not look up"

to recognize the height of Arthur's purity.

56. **Felt .. life.** In this line the first, second, and fifth foot are trochees, as is also the first foot of the next line :—

"Félt the | líght of | her éyes | ínto | his life
Smíte on | the súd-|den."

Such variations from the usual iambic regularity—"discords dear to the musician" (*Sea Dreams*)—give strength and emphasis and prevent monotony. For other examples, see General Introduction, p. xix. Malory says simply, "And there had King Arthur the first sight of Guenever, daughter unto King Leodegraunce, and ever after he loved her."

62. **For while.** *For* introduces the reason of his return.

65. **for most ... kings.** See below, lines 110-115, for the names of some of them.

72. **the son of Gorlois.** Gorlois is called by Geoffrey of Monmouth '*dux Cornubiæ*,' and by Malory 'duke of Tintagel' in 'Cornewayle.' "The small town of Tintagell, in Cornwall, is situated on the coast of the Bristol Channel, about four miles from Camelford. The ruins of the castle, which had become so celebrated in medieval romance, are still seen on the brow of a

rock, partly insulated, overlooking the sea" (Note in Wright's Malory). See below, lines 184-220.

73. **the son of Anton.** See below, lines 220-223. Malory says, "Well," said Merlin, "I know a lord of yours (Uther's) in this land that is a passing true man and a faithful, and he shal have the nourishing of your child; his name is Sir Ector, and hee is lord of a faire livelyhood in many parts of England and Wales." In the English *Merlin* this lord is called 'Sir Antour.'

75. **Travail ... of the life.** As in the birth of a child, so it is natural that in the birth of first love there should be a painful sense of yearning and a strong disturbance of a man's whole being. So Adam, speaking of Eve (Milton, *P. L.* viii. 530) says:—

> "here passion first, I felt,
> Commotion strange."

81. **What happiness ... lonely King.** Cf. Adam's complaint in Paradise, *P. L.* viii. 364-5:—

> "In solitude
> What happiness? Who can enjoy alone?"

82. **ye stars that shudder.** Cf. *Fatima*:—

> "O Love, Love, Love! O withering might!
> O Sun, that from thy noonday height
> Shudderest when I strain my sight."

83. **O earth ... under me.** So, in *The Princess*, the "doubts" and "haunting sense of hollow shows" that vex the Prince, die out when the woman he loves yields herself up to him in answer to his prayer,

> "Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;
> Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust in me."

84. **for saving I be join'd ... make it live.** The idea that woman is the complement of man so that only in wedded happiness can man's ideally perfect state be found and that only in such a union can the purpose of his life be rightly fulfilled is the main 'moral' of *The Princess*: see the last canto.

94. **as he speaks ... tale.** The narrative is now resumed by the poet.

95. **field-of-battle bright ... star.** With this bright picture of Arthur's great battle at the foundation of his realm contrast that in *The Passing of Arthur* of the "last dim, weird battle of the west," where the death-white mist and confusion dulled the hearts of all.

103. **The long-lanced .. run.** Cf. Malory i. 13, "Then either battaile let their horses runne as fast as they might," and i. 15, "All these fortie knightes rode on afore, with great speres on their thyghes, and spurred theyr horses myghtely as fast as theyr

horses might runne." **battle**, the main body of an army. Cf. Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, vi. 16 :—

> " Their barbed horsemen, in the rear,
> The stern battalia crowned."

let, here used in the sense of *made, caused*. Cf. the common use of *lassen* in German, and *Geraint and Enid*, i.:—

> " Then the good King gave orders to let blow
> His horns for hunting on the morrow morn."

105. **as here and there ... swaying**, as the chief struggle swerved now to one part of the field, now to another.

106. **the Powers ... world.** So in *Guinevere* we read of the " signs and miracles and wonders " that showed the sympathy of Nature with Arthur at the founding of the Round Table, and how the land was full of life—

> " so glad were spirits and men."

110. **the kings Carádos . . Orkney.** These names are all to be found in Malory, where (in Wright's edition) they are spelt Carados, Urience (" of the land of Gore "), Cradelmont (or Cradelmans), Clauriance (or Clariance), Brandegoris, Angusance (or Angwysance), Morganore (" sencyall with the king of the hundred knights "), and Lot. Geoffrey of Monmouth calls Anguisant ' Anguselus, King of the Scots.'

120. **' Ho ! they yield !'** Cf. Malory, i. 15 : " With that came Merlyn upon a great black horse, and sayde to King Arthur, ' Ye have never done ; have ye not done ynough ? of three score thousand ye have left on lyve but fifteene thousand ; it is tyme for to saye ho —'." ' Ho ' is the formal exclamation used by a commander in battle or the umpire in a tournament to order a cessation of hostilities ; cf. Mallory, x. 44 : " Therewith the haut prince cried Ho ; and then they went to lodging."

121. **like a painted battle.** Cf. Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner* :—

> " As idle as a painted ship,
> Upon a painted ocean."

Observe the accents in this line—

> " Só like a paínted báttle the wár stoód "

—where the two accented syllables at the end of the line weight the rhythm and slow it down to prepare the representative pause after " Silenced," in the next line. See General Introduction, p. xviii.

124. **his warrior ... most.** Sir Lancelot of the Lake ; see below, lines 446, 7.

127. **the fire of God ... battle-field.** Cf. *Lancelot and Elaine*, where Lancelot again says of Arthur

"in his heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
No greater leader."

129. **Whereat the two ... deathless love.** In the days of chivalry it was a common custom for two knights to swear to each other a defensive and offensive alliance, and they were then called *fratres jurati*, sworn brothers.

132. **Man's word is God in man.** This expression occurs again in *Balin and Balan*. So in *Harold*, ii. 2, "Words are the man."

135. **Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.** Scan

"Úlfius | and Brás|tiás | and Béd|ivére."

Lines composed of proper names often take license in their scansion: cf. Verg. *Georg.* i. 437:—

"Glāucō | ēt Pănŏ|pæĕ ĕt | Īnō|ō Mĕlī|cērtæ. '

Ulfius seems to be the Latinized form of the English 'wolf.' "Geoffrey of Monmouth calls him *Ulfinus de Ricaradock*. In the early French romances it is *Ulfins*, and the *Ulfius* of the English editions may be a mere misreading ' (Note in Wright's Malory).

141. **holp.** Cf. *holpen*, line 160, below.

150. **Merlin ... art.** "According to Geoffrey of Monmouth (lib. vi. cc. 18, 19) Merlin had been court magician since the time of Vortigirn, who had caused him to be sought as the only one capable of relieving him out of the difficulty he had encountered in raising a castle on Salisbury Plain" (Note in Wright's Malory). Welsh traditions spell the name Mereddin and narrate that he was the Bard of Emrys Wledig, the Ambrosius of Saxon history, by whose command he built Stonehenge. "The true history of Merlin seems to be that he was born between the years 470 and 480, and during the invasion of the Saxon took the name of Ambrose, which preceded his name of Merlin, from the successful leader of the Britons, Ambrosius Aurelianus, who was his first chief and from whose service he passed into that of King Arthur, the southern leader of the Britons" (Morley, *English Writers*, i.). Malory introduces Merlin somewhat abruptly as called in to help Uther in his love sickness for the fair Igrayne. This he does on condition that Uther and Igrayne's son shall be given up as soon as born into his keeping "for to nourish there as I will have it, for it shall be your worship and the childes availe as much as the child is worth." Merlin is represented in *Merlin and Vivien* as the son of a demon and also as "the great Enchanter of the Time," and again as

"the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people call'd him Wizard—"

152. **Merlin's master ... Bleys.** Bleise, Bleyse, or Blaise, according to the legend of *Merlin*, was a holy hermit who had protected the mother of Merlin from the fiend who was Merlin's father and had undertaken Merlin's education from infancy. Malory tells us how Merlin, after Arthur's great battle against the kings, took his leave of King Arthur "for to goe see his master Bleise which dwelt in Northumberland"; Merlin gave Bleise an account of the fight, "and so Bleyse wrote the battayle word by worde as Merlyn tolde him, how it began, and by whom, and in like wise howe it was ended and who had the worst. All the batayles that were done in Arthurs dayes Merlyn caused Bleyse his master to write them."

155. **sat him down.** *Him* is here, by origin, in the dative case; such 'reflexive datives' with intransitive verbs were very common in old English; for examples see Maetzner, *Eng. Gram.* vol. ii. pp. 64, 65. Cf. *Œnone*, 156, "rest thee sure," and Scott, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, ii. 2, "Speed thee what thou hast to do."

160. **holpen half as well ... of me.** Meaning, of course, that the chamberlain's help had, in fact, been less than no help at all.

166. **I have seen ... chase,** the reason being that the young cuckoo, having been hatched in the nest of the lesser fowl, tries to oust the offspring of the rightful owner; cuckoos' eggs are often found in the nests of smaller birds. The King asks if the lords have any reason for thinking Arthur has been put in possession of a throne to which he has by birth no right. Cf. *Harold: Show-day at Battle Abbey*:—"The cuckoo ... Crying with my false egg I overwhelm The native nest."

173. **Then Bedivere ... the King.** The character of Bedivere, who, in *The Passing of Arthur*, is the King's last companion—"First made and latest left of all the knights"—is distinctly and consistently painted. He is a plain, blunt, honest soul, who troubles himself little about the doubts and difficulties which beset the belief of others in the right of Arthur's kingship. He takes no account of any supernatural claim, sweeps away all the mystery with which some would surround Arthur's birth, and gives a simple, natural and, to himself at all events, a satisfactory account of Arthur's parentage. Compare his conduct in *The Passing of Arthur*, where, when even the King is shaken by doubts and inward questionings, he will have none of them, where he cares nothing for ghosts and dreams, and reckons all mystic portents as the harmless glamour of the field. He feels that Arthur is his true king, and having once made up his mind on the point despises all rumours and never swerves from unquestioning loyalty.

178. **For there be ... baseborn.** See Introduction to the *Idylls*.

181. **And there be ... from heaven.** See Introduction.

182. **but my belief.** An instance of the syntax known as the "pendent nominative"; the noun 'belief' is left 'hanging,' as it were, with no verb to rest on, owing to a change of construction after the sentence has been begun.

184. **Sir, for ye know,** etc. *For* often begins a promised story; cf. lines 358, 9, below, and *The Passing of Arthur*, 6. So γάρ in Greek and *enim* in Latin.

187. **Ygerne.** "For she was called a fair lady and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine" (Malory, i. 1).

188. **daughters had she borne.** These are called by Malory Margawse, Elaine, and Morgan le Fay; the last named "was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of nigromancy."

194. **the bright dishonour.** An example of the figure of speech called 'oxymoron'; cf. Horace's *Splendide mendax*, and *Lancelot and Elaine*:—

> "His honour rooted in dishonour stood
> And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

204. **afterward ... After him.** Malory makes Uther survive Arthur's birth nearly two years.

210. **all before his time.** "All" is an adverb='quite' or 'much.'

211. **all as soon as born.** "All"='just.'

212. **Deliver'd ... postern-gate.** "Then when the lady was delivered, the king commanded two knights and two ladies to take the child bound in a cloth of gold, and that ye deliver him to what poor man ye meet at the postern gate of the castle. So the child was delivered unto Merlin" (Malory, i. 3).

217. **for each ... hand.** "Then stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many wend to have been king" (Malory, i. 3).

223. **rear'd him ... own.** Malory calls young Arthur Sir Kay's "nourished brother," and tells how on learning his real parentage he says of his foster father, "Ye are the man in the world that I am most beholding to and my good lady and mother your wife, that as well as her own hath fostered me and kept."

230. **A hundred ... baseborn.** "Some of the kings had marvel of Merlin's words and deemed well that it should be as he said: and some of them laughed him to scorn, as King Lot: and more other called him a witch" (Malory, i. 6).

234. **clamour'd for a king.** "And at the feast of Pentecost all manner of men assayed to pull at the sword that would assay, but none might prevail but Arthur; and he pulled it out afore all the lords and commons that were there, wherefore all the

commons cried at once, We will have Arthur unto our king" (Malory, i. 5).

245. **as he could ... would**, as liberally as his broken fortunes allowed, not as liberally as he would have wished.

247. **ice on summer seas**, as little likely to endure as ice that has floated into the warmth of southern seas. Icebergs frequently float from the Arctic regions so far south as to be melted by the warm Gulf Stream. Cf. Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House*, xi. 2:

"An iceberg in an Indian sea."

252. **Hath body enow**, has strength enough, whether of arm, or mind, or following. Thoughout the *Idylls*, Tennyson uses the old form 'enow': it was originally a plural form of 'enough.'

253. **O King ... and**, etc., *i.e.* "O King, (listen) and (then) I will tell," etc. Tennyson frequently uses this old form, a conjunction immediately following an invocation.

257. **daïs**, from the same root as *disc*, and meaning originally a quoit, then a round platter, then a high table, then a canopy over a high table or throne, and finally the raised platform on which a high table or a throne stands.

259. **in low deep tones ... coming of a light.** These lines are often quoted as the finest in the poem.

261. **so strait vows.** *Strait* and *strict* are doublets, *i.e.* words of the same (or a similar) meaning from one root. These vows are briefly enumerated in *Gareth and Lynette*:—

"my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter gentleness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King,"

See Tristram's account of these vows in *The Last Tournament*.

262. **some Were pale ... ghost**, being struck with awe at the solemnity of the vows they had sworn.

263. **Some flush'd**, as fired by noble enthusiasm for lofty deeds.

264. **others dazed ... light**, dazzled, as it were, by the brightness of the revelation of a new life and duties in store for them, which at first they could only partly understand. A picture of this life and its duties is given in *Guinevere*:—

"I made them lay their hands in mine and swear,
To reverence the King as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,

To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her."

267. **large**, sublime. **comfortable**, comforting, cheering; Tennyson has 'comfortable words' again in *The Lover's Tale* and in *Queen Mary*, v. 2. So in the Communion Service in the English Prayer Book: "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith to all that truly turn to him."

269. **From eye ... likeness of the King.** Cf. *The Holy Grail* :—

"and this Galahad when he heard
My sister's vision, fill'd me with amaze;
His eyes became so like her own, they seem'd
Hers, and himself her brother more than I."

273. **Down from the casement**, *i.e.* through the glass of the "storied window richly dight" with the picture of Christ on the Cross.

274. **vert, and azure**, heraldic names for green and blue. In early legends the different colours are sometimes supposed to be symbolic of various virtues or feelings. Thus *red*, "celestial rosy red, Love's proper hue," as Milton calls it, typified Love, *green*, Hope, and *blue*, Truth or Faith.

275. **three fair queens.** See Introduction. On the deck of a dark barge which bears Arthur away after his last battle in *The Passing of Arthur*, there also stood "black-stoled, black-hooded" "three queens with crowns of gold" who "put forth their hands and took the king and wept." Bedivere asks if they be not

"the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when clothed with living light,
They stood before the throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

See note to *The Passing of Arthur*, line 366.

279. **mage Merlin.** See note to l. 150, above.

282. **Lady of the Lake.** For Malory's account of "How Arthur by the mean of Merlin gat Excalibur his sword of the Lady of the Lake," see his *Morte d'Arthur*, i. 23.

283. **Who knows ... Lord.** See Introduction.

284. **Clothed ... wonderful.** "And in the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite" (Malory). See also the description of the finding and the casting away of Excalibur in *The Passing of Arthur*, where this line is repeated as a 'permanent epithet' of the arm that arose from the lake. **samite** is a rich silk stuff interwoven with gold or silver thread; derived from Gk. *hex*, six, and *mitos*, thread of the warp, literally 'woven of six threads'; cf. *dimity*. Tennyson has 'red

samite' and 'blackest samite' in *Lancelot and Elaine*, and 'crimson samite' in *The Holy Grail*.

285. **his huge cross-hilted sword.** The cross-shaped hilt of the swords of Christian knights, symbolic of their religious belief, was often used as a sacred emblem upon which oaths were taken, and which sometimes reminded them of their vows. Malory (xiv. 9) tells of Sir Percivale how, when sore tempted, "by adventure and grace he saw his sword lie upon the ground all naked, in whose pommel was a red cross, and the sign of the crucifix therein, and bethought him on his knighthood, and his promise made toforehand unto the good man. Then he made the sign of the cross in his forehead, and therewith the pavilion turned up so down, and then it changed unto a smoke and a black cloud, and then he was adred."

286. **a mist ... Lord.** For the allegorical significance of this description see Introduction; and cf. the description of the gate of the Lady of the Lake in *Gareth and Lynette*.

290. **A voice as of the waters.** Cf. Bible, *Rev.* xiv. 2, "And I heard a voice from Heaven, as the voice of many waters." Cf. also *Lancelot and Elaine*:—

> "She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns,
> Heard on the winding waters."

for she dwells ... world. It is a scientific fact that even the most violent storms affect only the surface of the ocean, leaving its depths undisturbed.

293. **Hath power ... Lord.** Cf. Bible, *Matt.* xiv. 25, "And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea."

294. **Excalibur.** In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, ii. 3, the Lady of the Lake, who had given Arthur the sword, says "The name of it is Excalibur, that is as much to say as Cut-steel." According to the English romance *Merlin*, the sword bore the following inscription:—

> "Ich am y-hote Escalabore,
> Unto a king a fair tresore;"

and it is added:—

> "On Inglis is this writing,
> Kerve steel and iren and al thing."

In the French *Merlin* it is said that the name is a Hebrew word meaning 'tres cher et acier fer,' which is, perhaps, a printer's mis-correction of the true reading 'trancher acier et fer,' carve steel and iron. Cf. Malory, iv. 9:—"And then he (Arthur) deemed treason, that his sword was changed; for his sword bit not steel as it was wont to do." The name is also written

Escalibore and *Caliburn*. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Chronicle* we read how "Arthur himself, dressed in a breastplate worthy of so great a king, places on his head a golden helmet engraved with the semblance of a dragon. Over his shoulders he throws his shield called *Priwen*, on which a picture of Holy Mary, Mother of God, constantly recalled her to his memory. Girt with *Caliburn*, a most excellent sword, and fabricated in the isle of Avalon, he graces his right hand with the lance named *Ron*. This was a long and broad spear, well contrived for slaughter." Merlin informed Arthur that Excalibur's scabbard was "worth ten of the sword, for while ye have the scabbard upon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded" (Malory, i. 23). Arthur had also a second-best sword, *Clarent;* and in *Merlin*, ii. 9, he is described as capturing the Irish king Ryance's "excellent sword *Marandoise.*" Gawain also had a "good sword," called *Galatine.*

The notion of enchanted armour is found in many old poets and romancers of various nations. In the *Mahabarat* the magic bow of Arjuna is described under the name *Gandiva*, and Mukta Phalaketu in the *Kathá Sarit Ságara* (chap. 115) is presented by Siva with a sword named *Invincible.* The names of some of the most celebrated of these enchanted weapons are given below:—

Ali's	sword,	*Zulfikar.*
Cæsar's	,,	*Crocea Mors.*
Charlemagne's	,,	*La Joyeuse.*
Lancelot's	,,	*Aroundight.*
Orlando's	,,	*Durindana.*
Siegfried's	,,	*Balmung.*
The Cid's	,,	*Colada.*

A list of some thirty-five such weapons is given in Brewer's *Dict. of Phrase and Fable, s.v. Sword.* Cf. Longfellow's lines:—

> "It is the sword of a good knight,
> Tho' homespun be his mail;
> What matter if it be not hight
> *Joyeuse*, *Colada*, *Durindale*,
> *Excalibar*, or *Aroundight.*"

Spenser (*F. Q.* ii. 8. 19) calls Arthur's sword *Morddure.*

297. **rich With jewels.** Cf. the description in *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 224-226.

298. **elfin Urim**, fairy jewellery of mystic significance. So in Milton, *Par. Lost*, vi. 760, 761, of the armour of the Son of God:

> "He in celestial panoply all arm'd
> Of radiant Urim, work divinely wrought."

Cf. the description of the "breastplate of judgment" made for the high priest, Bible, *Exodus*, xxviii. 15-30:—"And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim;

and they shall be upon Aaron's heart when he goeth in before the Lord; and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually": also *Numbers*, xxvii. 21, *Deut.* xxxiii. 8, *Ezra*, ii. 63, and 1 *Sam.* xxviii. 6:—"And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." The Urim and Thummim seem to have been a mysterious contrivance in or on the High Priest's breastplate, which was supposed to give oracular responses; it consisted, according to some authorities, either of the four rows of precious stones upon which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed, or of three precious stones, one of which, by some peculiar appearance on it, indicated 'Yes,' another 'No,' while the third implied that the answer was neutral. Urim means Light, and Thummim, Truth.

299. **the blade ... by it.** Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*:—

> "but this was all of that true steel
> Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
> And lightnings played about it in the storm."

Cf. Malory, i. 7, "Then he drew his sword Excalibur, but it was so bright in his enemies eyes that it gave light like thirty torches." So also in *The Passing of Arthur* when Excalibur was cast away, it

> "Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon."

300. **on one side ... Is yet far off.** See Introduction.

312. **The swallow ... dear sister.** Though not in the interrogative form, this statement is meant to suggest a question and a doubt.

319. **And Gawain ... half heard.** The distinction here suggested between the natures of Gawaine and Modred is carried out in the other Idylls. For a sketch of the characters of the two brothers see *The Passing of Arthur*, notes to ll. 33 and 59. In *Guinevere* also Modred's eaves-dropping propensity is noticed:—

> "Modred still in green, all ear all eye,
> Climb'd to the high top of the garden wall
> To spy some secret scandal if he might."

324. **Struck for the throne .. doom.** See *Guinevere* and *The Passing of Arthur*.

329. **fair .. of men.** Arthur's fairness of complexion is alluded to in *The Passing of Arthur;* see lines 337, "with wide blue eyes," and 384, "his light and lustrous curls." The ancient Britons were generally of a light complexion, and 'blonde as an Englishwoman' is still used in France as a description of unusual fairness.

336. "**Ay ... and hear ye,**" "Is it so and do you hear.'

346. **who ... can walk Unseen.** A common attribute of wizards, generally described as inherent in some magic amulet, dress, ring, or herb that they wore. Cf. Shaks., i. *Henry IV.* iv. 4. :— "We have the receipt of fern-seed, we walk invisible," and Beaumont and Fletcher, *Fair Maid of the Inn*, i. :—

> "Why, did you think that you had Gyges' ring,
> Or the herb that gives invisibility?"

362. **Shrunk like a fairy changeling.** It was an accepted doctrine of fairy lore that wicked fairies had the power to substitute an elf or imp of their own species for a human child. The changeling, however, was soon recognized as no natural offspring by its peevishness and wizened, shrivelled appearance; it often resembled a little old man with a face full of puckers and wrinkles. Cf. Shaks., i. *Henry IV.* i. 1. :—

> "Oh, that it could be proved
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
> In cradle-clothes, our children as they lay."

374. **and all ... decks.** Contrast this bright vision with the gloomy blackness of the "dusky barge, dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern" which carries Arthur away in *The Passing of Arthur*. The dragon ship is "gone as soon as seen"; the barge glides slowly away till it appears to go

> "From less to less and vanish into light."

379. **a ninth one.** Every ninth wave, and in a smaller degree every third, was commonly believed to be larger than those that went before it. Cf. ἐν κάκων τρικυμίᾳ, Æschylus, *Prom. Vinct.* 1015. Southey, in his Notes to *Madoc*, says that the ninth wave is often spoken of by Welsh poets, and quotes, "Eva, of the hue of the spraying foam before the ninth wave." The Romans thought that the tenth wave was the largest: "Decumana ova dicuntur et decumani fluctus, quia sunt larga."

380. **full of voices.** Cf. *The Voice and the Peak;* and *Ulysses*, l. 55 :—

> "the deep
> Moans round with many voices;"

also *The Passing of Arthur*, l. 134, of the sea :—

> "rolling far along the gloomy shores
> The voice of days of old and days to be"

and ll. 290, 464, of this Idyll :—

> "A voice as of the waters."

It is recorded that Tennyson's first line of poetry, composed at the age of 5 years, was

> "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind.'

390. **presently**, immediately; this was the old meaning of the word, which has now come to denote 'after a short interval.'

391. **Free sky**, clear of its dismal, dark clouds.

392. **part**, *i.e.* 'depart,' the old meaning of 'part,' whereas the old meaning of 'depart' was the same as that of the modern 'part' = 'separate,' the two words having exchanged meanings. In the marriage service of the Church of England the phrase "till death us *do part*" appears to be a modern substitution for the original "till death us *depart*," *i.e.* "till death separate us." So Scott, *Marmion*, ii. 32, has, of a man condemned to death,

"Sinful brother, part in peace."

401. **riddling triplets of old time.** Cf. *Gareth and Lynette* :—

"'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?
Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?'"

The most ancient of the Cambrian Bards wrote in stanzas of three rhyming lines, called *Englyn Milwr*, or "The Warrior's Triplet," each line containing seven syllables. Hence are said to have sprung the Welsh Triads, which contained the Cymric systems of theology, ethics, history, jurisprudence, and bardism. Facts and teachings were strung together in successive groups of three of a kind.

402-410. Merlin's riddling response would give Queen Bellicent but little satisfaction; but what more definite answer could be offered by the human intellect, however powerful, to a question which in effect is identical with Pilate's query, "What is truth?" "As we have before our eyes," he says, "the great processes of Nature and their outward effects, so we see in human life the ripening of youth and the decay of age.

"The result of Nature's workings may present different phenomena to different eyes, but each may be to the eye that sees it a truthful reflection of objective fact, and the variation may be due to the difference of the point of view.

"The various forces of Nature call the wild flower into visible life: what more does anyone know of its origin? And of Arthur's origin different views may be held, and each, in its kind, may be true: all that I can tell is that he springs from the great deep of a mysterious past, rises through an arc of visible existence, and sinks again into the great deep of an unfathomable eternity."

But some of Merlin's expressions seem meant to have a side reference to the incidents narrated by the Queen: thus, the "old man's wit" that wanders may glance at Bleys's strange tale, and the 'naked' truth recalls the 'naked babe.' The mocking answer of the old seer (in *Gareth and Lynette*) to Gareth, who asked him

a question similar to Queen Bellicent's here, has much in common with Merlin's mysterious response. Cf. particularly the seer's

> "And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
> Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me?"

409. **From the great deep ... he goes.** According to the *Triads of Bardism*, "Animated Beings have three States of Existence, that of Inchoation in the Great Deep or Lowest Point of Existence; that of Liberty in the State of Humanity; and that of Love, which is happiness in Heaven." Cf. *De Profundis; The Two Greetings*, i., of birth and death—

> "Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep
> . . . . . .
> To that last deep where we and thou are still."

and *Crossing the Bar*:—

> "When that which drew from out the boundless deep
> Turns again home."

Cf. also *Guinevere*:—

> "And that his grave should be a mystery
> From all men, like his birth."

417. **wage-work.** For examples of alliteration in double words, see General Introduction. Cf. *haze-hidden*, l. 429, below.

420. **will not die ... come again.** The belief in a 'second coming' is found in many of the legends of ancient heroes, *e.g.* in those of Charlemagne, Barbarossa, Desmond, Sebastian of Brazil. Malory, xxi. 7. writes, "Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu in another place. And men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse, "Hic jacet Arthurus Rex quondam Rexque futurus."

429. **a phantom king ... Crown'd.** Mr. Hutton, *Literary Essays*, remarks on this dream, "... the dream in which he mingles the story of the actual wars of Arthur against the heathen with the rumours of the still struggling passions of his rebellious subjects, and yet augurs that the grandeur of the king will survive even the history of his deeds—is a splendid embodiment of Tennyson's drift throughout the poem. Grant that a perfect king is a phantom of the human imagination, yet it is a phantom which will haunt it long after what we call the real earth shall have dissolved ... Like all true authority, that of the ideal king is hidden in mystery, but the image of his glory in the heavens survives the crumbling of his kingdom on earth."

449. **flowers ... latter April.** Notice the appropriateness of the season.

451. **in May.** The joyousness of May time is often a theme of old writers. Malory, xx. 1, writes, "In May, when every lusty heart flourisheth and burgeneth; for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable, so man and woman rejoice and gladden of summer coming with his fresh flowers."

452. **Dubric** or Dubritius, archbishop of Caerleon-upon-Usk and primate of Britain. Drayton, *Polyolbion*, xxiv., calls him "St. Dubric, whose report old Caerleon still doth carry."

454. **The stateliest of her altar-shrines.** Malory, iii. 5, says, "Then was the high feast made ready and the King was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guenever in the church of St. Stephen's with great solemnity."

459. **fields of May ... white with May ... Sun of May.** Many similar instances of repetition in successive lines of some leading word may be found in Tennyson's poems. Cf. *Geraint and Enid*, i. :—

> "Forgetful of his promise to the king,
> Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
> Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
> Forgetful of his glory and his name,
> Forgetful of his princedom and its cares;"

also *The Holy Grail* :—

> "Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh
> Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
> Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
> Blood-red;"

and *Guinevere* :—

> "Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
> For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
> To where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

464. **A voice as of the waters.** See l. 290, above.

468. **with drooping eyes.** Was this an ordinary bride timidity or due to her consciousness that her heart was not the king's?

476. **Great Lords from Rome.** Malory, v. 1, tells how twelve aged ambassadors of Rome came to King Arthur as ambassadors and messagers from the Emperor Lucius, which was called at that time Dictator or Procuror of the Public Weal of Rome, to demand truage of the realm on the ground of the statutes and decrees made by Julius Cæsar conqueror of the realm. And subsequently we read how Arthur made war against Lucius and smote him with Excalibur, "that it cleft his head from the summit of his head, and stinted not till it came to his breast. And then the emperor fell down dead, and there ended his life."

488. **That God ... secret word.** Arthur had, doubtless, informed his knights, when swearing them of the Table Round, how

authority had been bestowed on him and sanction given to his "boundless purpose" by secret revelation from heaven.

499. **The King will follow ... King.** Cf. St. Paul's words, Bible, 1 *Cor.* xi. 1:—"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

503. **The slowly-fading ... world.** In the fifth century (about 411) the last of the Roman legions was withdrawn from Britain. Rome needed all her soldiers at home: the Goth was on her track, and as an empire she was already on the wane.

506. '**Behold ... pay.**' Malory, v. 2, tells "how the kings and lords promised to King Arthur aid and help against the Romans." Arthur's reply to the demand for truage is thus given: "I will that ye return unto your lord and Procuror of the Common Weal for the Romans and say to him, Of his demand and commandment I set nothing, and that I know of no truage, ne tribute that I owe to him, ne to none other earthly prince, Christian ne heathen; but I pretend to have and occupy the sovereignty of the empire, wherein I am entitled by the right of my predecessors, sometime kings of this land."

511. **your Roman wall.** Agricola drew a line of military stations across the interval, about 40 miles in length, between the Firth of Forth and the Clyde; in the reign of Antoninus Pius this line was afterwards fortified by a turf rampart, erected on foundations of stone. The Emperor Hadrian caused a rampart of earth to be erected between Newcastle and Carlisle, and Septimius Severus had a stone wall built parallel to Hadrian's rampart and in the same locality. Considerable traces of these walls may still be seen.

517. **twelve great battles.** Some of these battles are enumerated and described in *Lancelot and Elaine.*

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

Notes.

The incidents in Arthur's career that immediately preceded his death are briefly these. The queen, Guinevere, had left the king's court, and fled to hiding at the nunnery of Amesbury, owing to the discovery by the treacherous Modred, the king's nephew, of her love for Lancelot. King Arthur had gone to attack Lancelot in the north; during his absence Modred had raised a revolt, and had had himself crowned king. The king marched south, and pursued Modred to the west coast. On his way he stopped at Amesbury, and had the farewell interview with the repentant queen so beautifully described in the Idyll of *Guinevere*. The king then marches westward in pursuit of Modred.

1. **That story ... minds.** These lines form a second and explanatory title to the poem. **the bold Sir Bedivere.** 'Bold' is what is called a 'permanent epithet,' since it is nearly always used by the poet along with the name of Bedivere. So, in Homer, Achilles is always 'swift-footed,' and in Vergil, Æneas is always 'pious', and in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, William of Deloraine is always 'good at need.' In *The Coming of Arthur* Bedivere's boldness shows itself specially in his defence of Arthur's right to the throne:—

> "For bold in heart and act and word was he,
> Whenever slander breathed against the King."

For other points in Bedivere's character see lines 50-64, 150-3, 256-277, below, and notes.

2. **First made and latest left.** Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*:—

> "Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
> Knighted by Arthur at his crowning—"

In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, xxi. 4, we read how at the end of his last great battle King Arthur "looked about him and there was hee warre that of al his hoost and of al his good knights, were left no moe alive but two knights, that was Sir Lucan the butler and Sir Bedivere his brother, and they were right sore wounded"; and in the next chapter Sir Lucan's death is described, "therewith the noble Knight's heart brast," so that Bedivere was left as the sole survivor of all Arthur's knights.

3. **when the man ... voice**, when extreme old age had left Bedivere only strength enough to tell the tale of his past life. Cf. the Latin *vox et præterea nihil.*

5. **other minds**, unsympathetic minds, different in feeling from those of Bedivere's fellows in the "true old times" that were dead; cf. ll. 395-406, below.

6. **For on their march.** 'For' introduces the facts which form the substance of Bedivere's story and which may be called the reason why he had a story to tell. **to westward.** See below, l. 59 and note.

7. **Who slowly ... King.** Bedivere, passing in the quiet night through the slumbering camp, overheard Arthur in his tent mourning over the failure of his purposes.

9. **I found Him ... find Him not.** Arthur cannot understand why the glory and power of God should be so clearly manifested in the works of nature, in the visible beauty of heaven and earth, while His dealings with mankind seem full of mystery and contradiction. Arthur had fought in God's cause and founded the Round Table for "love of God and men": was he now to die amid the ruins of his life's work?

13. **for why.** In Old English we have a form *forwhy* or *forwhi* (= because), where *why* or *whi* is the old instrumental case of the relative pronoun *who*. The expression *for why*, used, as here, as an equivalent to the interrogative *wherefore*, is met with in old ballad poetry and in modern imitations of it, as in Cowper's *John Gilpin*, ll. 211-12:—

> "He lost them sooner than at first;
> For why?—they were too big."

In *Harper's Magazine* for December 1883, Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie writes, "The first 'Idyll' and the last, I have heard Mr. Tennyson say, are intentionally more archaic than the others." This archaism is noticeable in the studied severity and simplicity of the diction generally as well as in the use of such old forms or words as *stricken*, *upheaven*, *lightly*, *hest*, *lief;* in the repetition of 'permanent epithets,' whether composed of single words as in 'bold Sir Bedivere,' or of whole lines as "Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful;" also in the formal introduction to each speech, as

> "Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere"
>
> "To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere."

14. **lesser God ... world.** So the Gnostic heresy taught that God was a being far removed from all care for this world, both creating and governing it by inferior powers or beings sent forth by Him, one of whom they held to be the 'Word' or the 'Wisdom' of God. This notion was adopted from the Platonic *demiurgus*. **lesser**, the double comparative form, is generally used as the comparative of 'less,' the adjective. In Shakspere, 'lesser' is sometimes an adverb, as in "Others that lesser hate him."

16. Cf. Tennyson, *The Ancient Sage*:—

"But some in yonder city hold, my son,
That none but Gods could build this house of ours,
So beautiful, vast, various, so beyond
All work of man, yet, like all work of man
A beauty with defect—till That which knows,
And is not known, but felt thro' what we feel
Within ourselves is highest, shall descend
On this half-deed, and shape it at the last
According to the Highest in the Highest."

from beyond, from His seat in the highest heavens.

19. **But that ... to the close.** Cf. Cowper's hymn beginning "God moves in a mysterious way," especially the lines

"Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain,"

and *Geraint and Enid*, ii.:—

"O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen."

Also *The Ancient Sage*:—

"My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,
So dark that men cry out against the Heavens.
Who knows but that the darkness be in man?
The doors of Night may be the gates of Light.
. . . . . .
And we, the poor earth's dying race, and yet
No phantoms, watching from a phantom shore
Await the last and largest sense to make
The phantom walls of this illusion fade
And show us that the world is wholly fair."

24. **And all ... peace** alludes specially to the treachery of Guinevere and Lancelot.

26. **Reels ... beast.** Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 10-12:—

"And so there grew great tracts of wilderness
Wherein the beast was ever more and more
But man was less and less, till Arthur came,"

and *The Last Tournament*, 122-5:—

"Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear'd
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences
Reel back into the beast and be no more."

Cf. also *In Mem.* cxviii. :—

"Till at the last arose the man;
Who throve and branched from clime to clime
The herald of a higher race
. . . . . .
Move upward, working out the beast
And let the ape and tiger die."

Many similar passages might be quoted to show that Tennyson views Nature and Society "with the eye of the evolutionist."

27. **My God ... death.** Compare the despairing cry of David, Bible, *Psalms*, xxii. 1, when he "complains in great discouragement," "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—a cry which is repeated by Christ on the Cross: see *Matthew*, xxvii. 46, and *Mark*, xv. 34. In various parts of *The Idylls of The King* an analogy is suggested between the life of Christ and that of the ideal King; common to both are the mystic origin, the unceasing struggle against evil, the seeming failure, the 'agony,' the 'passing, to come again.' Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 116 :—

"Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King."

Cf. also line 157, below, and note; and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* :—

"Forward till you see the highest Human Nature is divine."

"King Arthur stands out as a mystic incarnation, a Christ-man pure, noble, un-erring: coming mysteriously into the world, and vanishing mysteriously, according to the prophecy of Merlin:

'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

He is the perfect flower of purity and chivalry, and the kingdom he seeks to found is the very kingdom of Christ upon earth" (Dawson's *The Makers of Modern English*).

28. **I pass ... not die.** Even in the extremity of his despair Arthur has faith in the fulfilment of the prophecy regarding his mysterious doom made by Merlin, 'the wise man'; see *The Coming of Arthur*, 418, 9 :—

"And Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him, that he will not die,
But pass again to come."

29. **weird battle.** See the description of the battle, below, lines 96-135.

30. **Gawain** was brother of Modred and Gareth and nephew of King Arthur, being son of his sister, "Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent."

31. **killed in Lancelot's war.** Malory, *Morte d'Arthur*, xxi. 2, thus describes Gawain's death: "And then was the noble

knight sir Gawaine found in a great boate lying more than halfe dead ... 'My uncle King Arthur,' said sir Gawaine, 'wit ye well that my deathes day is come and all is through mine owne hastinesse and wilfulnesse, for I am smitten upon the old wound that sir Launcelot du Lake gave me, of the which I feele that I must die.' And so at the houre of noone sir Gawaine betooke his soule into the hands of our Lord God."

31. **the ghost of Gawain.** The heading of Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*, xxi. 3, is "How after sir Gawaine's goast appeared unto King Arthur, and warned him that he should not fight as at that day." The appearance of such visions, significant of coming evil, before a fatal fight, is often narrated in old chronicles: cf. the vision of Samuel appearing to Saul at Endor before his last battle and death, and that of Cæsar to Brutus before Philippi, and those of the Norman Saints to Harold before Senlac (*Harold*, v. 1). Malory makes Arthur have a dream also before his first great fight for the throne. **blown ... wandering wind.** In Dante's *Purgatorio*, Canto v., the punishment of "carnal sinners" is thus described:—

> "The stormy blast of hell
> With restless fury drives the spirits on,
> Whirl'd round and dash'd amain with sore annoy.
> When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,
> There shrieks are heard, there lamentations, moans,
> And blasphemies 'gainst the good Power in heaven.
> I understood that to this torment sad
> The carnal sinners are condemn'd, in whom
> Reason by lust is sway'd" (Cary's Translation).

Somewhat similar is the idea in Vergil, *Æn.* vi. 140:—

> "aliæ panduntur inanes
> Suspensæ ad ventos."

32. **Hollow all delight** Gawain's character is gradually developed in the *Idylls*. At first we have a bright, frank, impulsive boy; see *The Coming of Arthur*, 319-21:—

> "And Gawain went, and breaking into song
> Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
> Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw."

Later (*Gareth and Lynette*) he appears as a knight of brilliant achievements:—

> "The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright."

In *Lancelot and Elaine* we find the first hint of the taint of disloyalty:—

> "Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
> And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint
> And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
> Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
> Not often loyal to his word."

The same Idyll says that his "wonted courtesy" was

"Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it."

In *The Holy Grail* his want of lofty aim and serious purpose is contrasted with his ready impulsiveness: we read how, when the knights took oath to ride a twelvemonth and a day in quest of the Grail, "Gawain swore, and louder than the rest," but that soon growing "much awearied of the quest," he renounced it and spent his year in dalliance; and how, subsequently, in "foolish words—A reckless and irreverent knight was he," he ridiculed all such enterprises.

And finally, in *Pelleas and Etarre*—though at first there flashed through his heart

"The fire of honour and all noble deeds"—

all noble impulse is dissipated by the first shock with temptation; although Pelleas knows him for the one "whom men call light of love," he trusts his pledged troth, only to find himself treacherously betrayed—

"Alas that ever knight should be so false."

It is only after Gawain's death that his spirit discovers and mourns the worthlessness of the earthly delights which in his lifetime he had put above his loyalty and his duty. The gradual lowering of Gawain's character is symbolic of that moral degeneration of the whole order of the Round Table which spoiled the purpose of Arthur's life.

The older chroniclers, before Malory, give Gawain a much nobler character, making him almost Lancelot's equal.

35. **an isle of rest,** "the island valley of Avilion" of line 427, below. So in Homer, *Od.* xi., the shade of Tiresias foretells to Odysseus:—

"So peaceful shalt thou end thy blissful days
And steal thyself from life by slow decays." (Pope.)

39. **wail their way.** Cf. the Canto from *The Purgatorio* of Dante, quoted above:—

"As cranes,
Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
Stretched out in long array, so I beheld
Spirits; who came loud wailing, hurried on
By their dire doom." (Cary.)

Cf. also Hom. *Il.* iii. 3, and Verg. *Æn.* x. 264.

41. **Shrill'd; but... cries.** Notice the effect of the unusual break, denoted by the semicolon, after the first half-foot; the reader is brought to a sudden pause, as if to listen to the shrill wail of the flying spirit. For other examples of this rhythm see General Introduction, p. xix.; and cf. Hom. *Il.* i. 52, βάλλ', αἰεὶ δὲ...

43. **As of some ... lords.** With this simile in illustration of cries of defeat and despair, contrast the one contained in lines 457-461, below, "Then from the dawn, etc," which describe the jubilant cries welcoming King Arthur to his isle of rest.

46. **light upon the wind.** Cf. Dante, *Purgatorio*, v. 72-4 :—

> "Bard! willingly
> I would address those two together coming
> Which seem so light before the wind." (Cary.)

48. **all that haunts ... wild.** So, in *Guinevere*, the Queen

> "Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
> And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
> Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan."

In the same Idyll, in a description of the signs and miracles and wonders which marked the founding of the Round Table, the gladness of "spirits and men," of "the little elves," the "fairy-circle" and "merry bloated things" is specially dwelt upon. All creation sympathized with Arthur's noble purposes at the outset, and now mourns his failure.

49. **go along with me**, be involved in my ruin.

51. **let pass ... field.** Bedivere's unimaginative and practical nature has no care for anything which he cannot see and touch and account for; all else he regards as of no significance, or, at most, as harmless.

53. **thy name ... cloud.** Cf. *The Last Tournament* :—

> "the knights,
> Glorying in each new glory, set his name
> High on all hills and in the signs of heaven,"

and *To the Queen*, at the end of the *Idylls* :—

> "that gray king, whose name, a ghost
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still."

'Arthur's Seat' is the name given to the lofty hill near Edinburgh and to other "high places" in various parts of Great Britain; certain cromlechs in Glamorgan and in Herefordshire are known as 'Arthur's Stones.'

56. **Light was Gawain.** Unworthy of trust or serious regard.

59. **Modred.** In *Guinevere* Arthur calls him

> "the man they call
> My sister's son—no kin of mine, who leagues
> With Lords of the White Horse, heathen and knights,
> Traitors ——"

and again, in lines 155-8, below, disclaims kinship with him. Modred's character is painted throughout the *Idylls* in the darkest colours. Even in boyhood his mean and treacherous nature

is hinted at in contrast with the frankness of the young Gawain; see *The Coming of Arthur*, 322, 3:—

> "But Modred laid his ear against the door,
> And there half heard."

Again, in *Gareth and Lynette*, 25-32, Gawain's hearty acknowledgment of young Gareth's prowess brings into strong relief Modred's ungraciousness:—

> "Though Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
> For he is always sullen."

Modred's shield in Arthur's Hall was "blank as death," for he had done no noble deed, while Gawain's was "blazoned rich and bright."

In the last line of *Pelleas and Etarre*—

> "And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand'"

—a hint is given that Modred had been secretly nourishing treacherous thoughts against the king; and, finally, in *Guinevere*, we read that it is Modred

> "that like a subtle beast
> Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne
> Ready to spring, waiting a chance."

The success of his traitorous scheming and his open rebellion bring the tale of his base life down to the date of the "last weird battle." **in the west.** Malory tells how, when Modred and his party had fled to Canterbury, after being worsted by Arthur in a great battle on "Barendowne" (? Barham-down, near Canterbury, where are still remains of an ancient burial-place), "the noble king drew him with his hoast downe unto the sea side westward unto Salisbury." In *Merlin* we read that finding Modred had retreated into Wales Arthur proceeded westward as far as Salisbury, whence he issued orders for assembling a fresh army, which was to meet him at Whitsuntide, and then continued his march still further into the West, where Modred with his force was ready to encounter him. Geoffrey of Monmouth states that Modred made his last stand in Cornwall on the river *Cambula*, called *Camblan* in the *Vita Merlini*. In Layamon's *Brut* the place is called *Camelford*.

63. **Right well ... King.** The doubts as to Arthur's rightful title to the throne, which arose out of the mystery of his birth, find frequent expression in *The Coming of Arthur*. The "many rumours on this head" are described by Bedivere (ll. 175-236), who gives his own matter-of-fact account of the affair, which is no mystery to his simple and loyal heart. Lancelot is the first to acknowledge Arthur's title (ll. 127-9):—

> "'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God
> Descends upon thee in the battle-field;
> I know thee for my king.'"

In *Gareth and Lynette* Bellicent, Arthur's sister, referring to the doubts of those

"who deem him not,
Or will not deem him wholly proven king,"

adds, as to her own belief,

"Albeit in mine own heart I knew him king."

After this, little is said of these doubts until, as we read in *The Last Tournament*, their vows "began to gall the knighthood," and they asked whence

"Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?"

This loss of faith, the result of the gradual weakening of the moral fibre of the Order, presages the final catastrophe.

67. **when we strove ... north.** "Arthur's glorious wars" are enumerated and, some of them, briefly described by Lancelot in *Lancelot and Elaine*. **the Roman wall,** see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 511 and note.

73. **And they my knights.** An instance of the construction known as the "pendent nominative"; owing to a change of syntax in the middle of the sentence, the nominative 'they' is left without a verb. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 182.

77. **One lying ... Almesbury.** See *Guinevere*:—

"prone from off her seat she fell
And grovelled with her face against the floor."

Ambrose-bury, Ambresbury, Almesbury, or Amesbury, in Wiltshire, 7½ miles from Salisbury, possessed an ancient abbey of Benedictine nuns, to which, as the old chronicles relate, Guinevere had fled after her fall.

78. **Hath folded ... world.** Has covered my path in life with darkness and confusion.

81. **Lyonnesse.** A fabulous country, an extension of Cornwall to the south and west, said to be now covered by the sea. There is still extant near Land's End a tradition that the Scilly Isles were once part of the mainland; similarly, in parts of Ireland, the belief exists that a large portion of the island was swallowed up by the sea and occasionally comes to the surface. The name is sometimes written Leonnoys.

87. **phantom circle** alludes to the distant sea-horizon, vague and ill defined; it is called "sea-circle" in *Enoch Arden*; Cf. *Ulysses*, 19, 20:—

"Whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move;"

also Shelley, *Euganean Hills*, 19, and Verg. *Æn.* iii. 496.

90. **when the great ... lowest,** *i.e.* in midwinter. Notice the appropriateness of the seasons to the various events in Arthur's

career. In *The Coming of Arthur* it is in "the night of the new year" that Arthur is born. When he is married to Guinevere,

"The sacred altar blossomed white with May."

In *The Holy Grail* it is "on a summer night" that the vision appears and the quest is undertaken. The date of *The Last Tournament* is placed in the "yellowing autumn tide." Guinevere's flight takes place when the white mist of early winter shrouds "the dead earth." The final catastrophe is now fitly accomplished at midnight in the dead of winter, the most sombre, most comfortless hour and season.

91. **rolling year.** Cf. Latin *volventibus annis* (Vergil, *Æn.* i. 234).

93. **Nor ever yet ... west.** Malory's account is as follows:—"and never was there seene a more dolefuller battaile in no Christain land, for there was but rashing and riding, foyning and stricking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke ... And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold ground: and ever they fought till it was nigh night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the doune." The following description from *Le Mort Arthur*, (edited by Mr. Furnivall from the Harleian MS. No. 2252 in the British Museum) gives a good idea of the style of the old poet:—

"Arthur of batayle neuyr blaune
To delè woundys wykke and wyde,
Fro the morow that it begaune,
Tylle it was nere the night*is* tyde;
There was many A sperè spente,
And many a thro word they spake,
Many A bronde was bowyd and bente,
And many a knight*is* helme they brake
Rychè helmes they Roffe and rent
The Rychè rowtes gan to-gedyr Rayke
And C thousand vpon the bente,
The boldest or evyn was made Ryght meke.

. . . . .

As *syr* lucan de boteler stode
He sey folk vpon playnès hye,
Bold barons of bone and blode,
They Refte theym besaunt, broche, and bee."

95. **A deathwhite mist.** So, in *Guinevere*,

"The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth and the land was still."

In *Merlin and Vivien* Merlin has a presage of

"An ever-moaning battle in the mist
World-war of dying flesh against the life."

Contrast with the description of "this last, dim, weird battle" the brilliant picture of Arthur's first battle in *The Coming of Arthur*:—

> "When Arthur reach'd a field-of-battle bright
> With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
> Was all so clear about him, that he saw
> The smallest rock far on the faintest hill
> And even in high day the morning star."

These are only two out of numerous occasions that may be found in the *Idylls* when the sympathy of external nature with the actions and emotions of man is vividly pictured.

98. **formless**, vague, ill-defined, objectless.

100. **For friend and foe ... voices of the dead.** With the whole of this description may be compared that of another 'weird' battle in *The Princess*. In both passages are found good examples of representative rhythm and of words whose sound echoes the sense. Thus in *The Princess* we find

> "until they closed
> In conflict with the crash of shivering points"

and

> "And all the plain—brand, mace, and shaft, and shield—
> Shock'd, like an iron-clanging anvil bang'd
> With hammers"

which have a close rhythmical and verbal affinity to line 188, below,

> "Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,"

and the following lines.

103. **old ghosts**, spectres of foes or friends long dead; cf. *The Princess*:—

> "I seem'd to move in old memorial tilts
> And doing battle with forgotten ghosts."

109. **Shield-breakings ... helms.** These lines recall the war-song of Arthur's knighthood at his marriage in *The Coming of Arthur*:—

> "Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,
> Clang battleaxe and crash brand, let the King reign."

A fine contrast may be noted between the jubilant strain in this song, prompted by faith in the King and his mission, and the echo of hopeless consternation arising from the despairing shocks of this dim battle and the

> "shrieks
> After the Christ, of those who falling down
> Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist."

114. **monstrous blasphemies.** So in the battle of Armageddon, Bible, *Rev.* xvi., men "blasphemed the name of God." Armageddon has been thought to be typical of the great final contest between good and evil in this world, and, so far, is of a similar significance to this

"battle in the West
Where all of high and holy dies away." (*To the Queen.*)

119. **or thro' death,** either because of death.

120. Notice the appropriateness of the dominant letter 's' in this line, representing the sibilant plash of the waves.

129. **the wan wave.** Cf. 'wan water,' *Gareth and Lynette.* In *Le Mort Arthur* we have the line

"But watres depe and wawes wanne."

See line 238, below, and note.

132. **hollow helmets,** empty, having fallen off the heads of the slain.

135. **The voice ... to be.** The ocean has frequently been used in literature as a symbol of Time and Eternity. Cf. Shaks. *Sonnets,* lx. 1, 2:—

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end."

and Byron's "Address to the Ocean," *Childe Harold,* iv.:—

"The image of Eternity."

140. **wastes ... move.** The sea slowly eating into the shore is an apt type of *tempus edax rerum,* 'Time that eats things away.' Colton says: "Time is the most subtle of depredators and by appearing to take nothing is permitted to take all."

143. **for on my heart ... King.** In the throes of the last dread struggle, as his physical strength ebbs low, the king's "sensuous frame Is racked with pangs that conquer trust" (*In Mem.* v.), and he begins almost to doubt the significance of his own mystic origin and the divine sanction of his "boundless purpose."

147. **King everywhere ... house.** Bedivere's simple loyalty is no prey to doubt; his practical temper finds no room for discussion while work remains to be done, but insists on prompt action with what powers are still available.

157. **My house ... vows.** Cf. Bible, *Luke,* xii. 49, 50, "And he stretched forth his hand to his disciples and said, 'Behold my mother and my brethren!' For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

170. **So all day long.** The original fragment *Morte d'Arthur* began at this point. The lines "So all day long ... King Arthur," which introduced the shorter poem, are here retained, to serve, perhaps, as a sort of recapitulation of the lines now prefixed,

that the reader's attention may be concentrated on the last scene which follows.

172. **King Arthur's table**, the knights of the Round Table. See note to *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 17. **man by man**, one after another.

177. **chancel**, the eastern and most sacred portion of a church, formerly always separated from the main part of the building by a screen of lattice work (Lat. *cancelli*, cross-bars).

178. **strait**, a narrow tongue of land; the word is more usually applied to a narrow passage in the ocean.

180. **a great water.** Since the poet wishes to represent the general impression produced by the view from the chapel, he avoids all detail, and uses the vague words 'a water' instead of 'a lake.' The beholder would not at first sight notice whether it was a lake or a broad river; all he would be conscious of would be a spreading sheet of water of size and shape unknown; and the picture is presented to the reader just as it would first strike the eye of Sir Bedivere. Subsequently, where no such instantaneous impression is depicted, the words 'mere' and 'lake' are used. Cf. Derwent*water*, Gala *Water*, etc. **the sequel**, what follows as the result of this day's fight.

182. **unsolders**, disunites, breaks into pieces. *Solder* (from the same root as *solid*) is a kind of metallic cement for uniting the surfaces of metals; it is often composed of zinc (or silver) and copper. It is sometimes spelt and pronounced *sodder* or *sawder*.

183. **fellowship**, confederation, united band (of knights of the Round Table).

184. **whereof** ... **record**, of all the fellowships of which, etc. **such a sleep.** The comparison of death to sleep is very common in Homer, Vergil, and other classical poets. Thus Homer, *Il.*, ii. 241, has κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον, 'he slept an iron sleep'; cf. Vergil, *Æn.*, x. 745, *ferreus urget somnus*, and Moschus's ἀτέρμονα νήγρετον ὕπνον. See also *In Mem.*, lxvii., "Sleep, death's twin brother." So in the Bible, *Acts*, vii. 60, Stephen "fell on sleep." Cf. *cemetery*, literally 'sleeping-place.'

189. **Camelot**, the city where Arthur held his court, now identified with a village called *Queen Camel*, in Somersetshire, where remains of the vast entrenchments of an ancient town are still to be seen. The traditions of Queen Camel still preserve the name of Arthur; the bridge over the river Camel is called 'Arthur's Bridge,' and there is a spring in the neighbourhood called 'Arthur's Well.' A description of Arthur's mysterious hall at Camelot is given in the Idyll of *The Holy Grail* in the lines beginning—

> "O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
> Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago."

190. **I perish ... made,** my life, and with it all my noble purposes, is brought to ruin by those whom I was the first to form into one people. See *The Coming of Arthur* :—

"But either failed to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And through the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned."

191. **Merlin.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, note to l. 150. The Idyll of *Merlin and Vivien* gives an account of Merlin's fate. See also Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*.

192. **let what will be, be,** whatever my future may be.

195. **Excalibur.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, note to line 294.

199. **clothed in white samite.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 284 and note. The recurrence of this line recalls the 'permanent epithets' noticed under l. 6.

202. **sung or told,** celebrated in song or story.

205. **fling him.** Arthur regards the magic sword as a person endowed with life and power of its own. **mere,** lake or pool; the word originally meant 'that which is dead,' hence a desert, waste, or stagnant pool; cf. Lat. *mare* and Skt. *maru*, a desert, from *mri*, to die; also French *mare* and English *marsh*.

206. **seest,** a dissyllable. **lightly,** nimbly or quickly. Malory's words are—"My lord, said Sir Bedevere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly (I will) bring you word again." 'Lightly' in this sense is common in Spenser's *Faery Queen*.

211. **hest,** from O. E. *hǽs*, command;—commonly written with the prefix *behest*. The *t* is an added letter as in *whils-t*. Chaucer uses *hest*, "the second *hest* of God," *Pardoner's Tale*, 185; Spenser, *F. Q.* vii. 18, has "holy *heasts*," and the word is frequently used by Shakspere: see *The Tempest*, i. 2. 274; iii. 1. 37, etc.; it occurs also in *Pelleas and Etarre*, "acted her hest." **at full,** to the utmost, thoroughly.

215. **mighty bones.** The bones of the Danish invaders heaped up in part of the church building at Hythe are abnormally large-sized, and seem to show that "there were giants in those days." As noted above, there are still extant traces of ancient tombs at Barham-down.

218. **by zig-zag ... rocks.** The short, sharp vowel sounds and the numerous dental letters in this line, making it broken in rhythm and difficult to pronounce, are in fine contrast with the broad vowels and liquid letters which make the next line run smoothly and easily off the tongue. The sound in each line exactly echoes the sense; the crooked and broken path leads to the smooth and level shore.

219. **levels.** The plural is probably suggested by the Latin plural, *aequora*. Brimley suggests, perhaps too ingeniously, that the poet may be hinting that what looks, when seen from the high ground, "a great water," becomes a series of flashing surfaces to the eyes of a man standing on the shore.

223. **keen with frost,** clear in the frosty air.

225. **topaz-lights.** The topaz is a jewel of various colours, yellow, or green, or blue, or brown. Perhaps from Skt. *tapas*, fire. **jacinth,** another form of *hyacinth*, a precious stone of the colour of the hyacinth flower, blue and purple. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 297-9.

226. **subtlest,** most skilfully wrought, or in a most intricate pattern.

228. **this way ... mind.** This expression is an imitation of Vergil, *Æn.* viii. 20, *Atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc*, 'And he divides his swift mind now this way, now that.' Cf. Homer, *Il.* i. 188, *ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ ... διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν.*

229. **in act to throw,** an expression much used by Pope in his translation of the *Iliad*. Cf. *Il.* iii. 349, *ὄρνυτο χαλκῷ*, which Pope renders—

> "Atreides then his massy lance prepares,
> In act to throw."

231. **water-flags,** aquatic plants of the genus *Iris*.

233. **so strode back slow.** These words are all accented, and the line thus becomes heavy and slow to pronounce; the rhythm thus echoes the heavy slow steps of Sir Bedivere.

238. **washing in the reeds—lapping on the crag.** It has been remarked that these two phrases mark exactly "the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier." The water would splash softly through the reeds, but would make a sharper sound when striking against the impenetrable rock. *Lap* means, generally, to 'lick up with the tongue, as a dog drinks'; and hence, as here, to 'make a sharp sound as a dog does when drinking.' Malory's words are, "I saw nothing but the waters wap (? beat) and the waves wan (? ebb)." [But in the *Le Mort Arthur*, Bedivere answers that he sees nothing

> "But watres depe and wawes wanne."

May not the 'wap' in Malory be a printer's error for 'deep'? If so, 'wan' also is an adjective, as in 'wan wave,' line 129, above.]

241. **betrayed thy nature,** been false to thy instinctive sense of honour and to thy title of knight. Malory says, "And thou

art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword."

243. **fëalty**, a doublet of *fidelity*.

248. **as thou art lief and dear.** Copied from Malory. *Lief* is from the same root as *love*, and means *beloved*. Shakspere (2 *Henry VI.* i. 1. 28) has '*alder-liefest*,' dearest of all.

252. **counting ... pebbles.** In times of grave moment, when the mind is absorbed in deep contemplation of some event of surpassing importance, the senses often mechanically employ themselves in noticing trifling objects: cf. *Maud*, ii. 2. 8:—

> "Strange, that the mind, when fraught
> With a passion so intense
> One would think that it well
> Might drown all life in the eye—
> That it should, by being so overwrought,
> Suddenly strike on a sharper sense
> For a shell or a flower, little things
> Which else would have been past by!"

254. **chased**, engraved. *Chased* is a contraction of *enchased*: literally, *incased*, or 'enclosed in a case or cover'; hence, 'covered with engraved ornament.'

257. **one worthy note**, *i.e.* 'a thing worthy of note, a notable thing.'

258. **should thus be lost**, ought (according to natural expectation) to be lost.

262. **the bond of rule**, the tie uniting the ruled to the ruler, the connecting link between a king and his subjects, which alone makes systematic government possible.

266. **what record ... kept.** For all his loyalty the worthy Bedivere can only partially recognise the scope of Arthur's purpose and life-work. Unless some material and palpable relic of the King is preserved, he thinks no trace of his deeds will remain for posterity.

267. **empty breath**, unsubstantial, impalpable report.

268. **rumours of a doubt**, vague traditions of a mythical person.

270. **joust** (or *just*), a tournament or sham fight; literally, a 'meeting together,' from Lat. *juxta*, near, close.

272. **maiden of the Lake.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 282-293. Malory thus describes Arthur's first meeting with this lady: "With that they saw a damsel going on the lake. What damsel is that? said Arthur. That is the Lady of the Lake, said Merlin;

and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a palace as any on earth, and richly beseen." The Lady of the Lake is in some of the romances identified with Vivien. Lancelot is called 'Lancelot of the Lake' from his having been educated at this lady's court; see the Idyll of *Lancelot and Elaine*, where the Lady is said to have stolen Lancelot from his mother's arms.

276. **winning reverence,** gaining respectful admiration from his hearers for this romantic story. **now** ... **were lost,** would be lost if I were to throw the sword away.

278. **clouded with his own conceit,** his power of clearly distinguisning right from wrong being obscured by his own false notion. **conceit** = conception, notion.

280. **and so strode,** etc. The frequent repetition of single lines should be noticed; it is Homeric.

281. **spoke.** Varied from *spake*, above, to prevent monotony.

287. **miserable,** mean, base.

289. **Authority** ... **will.** When the commanding look that inspires awe and obedience passes from the eye of a king, he loses therewith his authority over his subjects. A critic has remarked that this personification (of authority) is "thoroughly Shakespearian; it assists the imagination without distressing the understanding, as when dwelt on and expanded in detail; deepening the impression of the sentiment by giving along with a true thought a grand picture" (Brimley's *Essays*). Cf. Elizabeth's words to Cecil: "*Must*," she exclaimed, "is *must* a word to be addressed to princes? Little man, little man, thy father, if he had been alive, durst not have used that word, but thou hast grown presumptuous, because thou knowest that I shall die" (Lingard, *Hist. of England*, vi. 316). Cf. also *Queen Mary*, v. 5:—

"The Queen is dying or you dare not say it."

290. **laid widow'd,** helplessly bereft. Tennyson uses this bold metaphorical word again in his *In Memoriam*, xvii., "my widow'd race," and lxxv., "My heart, though widow'd," and in *Queen Mary*, i. 5, "widow'd channel."

293. **offices,** services, duty; cf. Lat. *officium*.

296. **giddy,** frivolous, transient.

298. **prosper,** succeed in doing his duty.

300. **with my hands.** Perhaps because he had now no sword; or, more probably, these words are introduced in imitation of Homer's graphic insertion of specific details: cf. ποσσὶν ἦιε μακρὰ βιβάς, 'he went taking long steps with his feet.' Notice the touch of human personality in the king's sharp anger; otherwise Arthur is generally represented by Tennyson as a rather colour-

less being, and as almost "too good for human nature's daily food." Guinevere in *Lancelot and Elaine* calls him

"the faultless king,
The passionate perfection."

301. **then quickly rose**, etc. "Every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with temptation" (Brimley).

304. **wheel'd**, swung it round over his head.

305. **made lightnings**, made a succession of brilliant flashes.

306. **and flashing ... in an arch.** "A splendid instance of sound answering to sense, which the older critics made so much of; the additional syllable (in the last foot, *ĭn ăn ārch*) which breaks the measure and necessitates an increased rapidity of utterance, seeming to express to the ear the rush of the sword up its parabolic curve" (Brimley).

307. **streamer of the northern morn**, tongue of light shooting from the horizon; one form of the *Aurora Borealis*. Cf. Scott, *Lady of the Lake*, iv. 9:—

"Shifting like flashes darted forth
By the red streamers of the north."

308. **moving isles of winter**, floating icebergs. Observe how the poet in three lines presents a complete picture of one of nature's grandest phenomena, thus introducing a most vivid simile without interrupting the flow of the narrative. Notice the compression of style. **shock**, collide.

311. **dipt**, went below. *To dip* generally means 'to put under the surface'; here 'to go under.'

316. **drawing thicker breath**, breathing more heavily as being nearer death.

317. **now see I by thine eyes.** Arthur had no need now to ask of Bedivere if he had obeyed the command; the expression of the knight's eyes told enough. The sudden exclamation is very dramatic.

323. **three lives of mortal men.** Homer (*Odys.* iii. 245) says of Nestor that he had been king during three generations of men. In later times Nestor was called τριγέρων.

334. **my wound ... cold.** Malory's words are, "Alas, the wound in your head hath caught much cold."

335. **half rose, slowly, with pain.** The two long syllables at the end of one line, and the pauses after the first and second feet of the next line, admirably represent the slow and interrupted effort of the wounded king to rise.

337. **wistfully**, with eager longing. *Wistful* is probably by origin a misspelling of *wishful*, from the mistaken idea that it was connected with O. E. *wis*, know.

338. **as in a picture**, as the eyes of a painted portrait often have a fixed and expectant gaze. Cf. Æschylus, *Agamemnon*, 240, ὥς ἐν γραφαῖς, 'She (Iphigenia) cast at each of those who sacrificed a piteous glance, gazing *as* (*one*) *in a picture*.'

345. **nightmare.** A fiend or witch, supposed to cause evil dreams. Skelton has "Medusa, that mare" (*i.e.* that hag).

350. **clothed with his breath**, enveloped as by a cloak in a mist caused by his own damp breath clinging round him in the frosty air.

351. **larger than human.** Cf. the Idyll of *Guinevere*:—

> "The moony vapour rolling round the king,
> Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
> Enwound him fold by fold."

Cf. also *Dream of Fair Women*, l. 87, and the Latin *humano major* (Ovid, *Fasti* ii. 503).

353. **like a goad.** The remorse he felt for his disobedience, and the fear that the king might suddenly die, urged him on as a goad urges oxen.

354. **harness**, originally, as here, body armour.

356. **bare black cliff clanged.** Observe the alliteration and the number of accented monosyllables succeeding each other, thus representing the successive reverberations of sound. Wordsworth (*Skating*) has a passage equally full of sound:—

> "With the din
> Smitten, the precipices rang aloud,
> The leafless trees and every icy crag
> Tinkled like iron."

based, planted; the word is generally used in a metaphorical sense.

358. **dint of armed heels**, the tread of iron-shod heels.

363. **ware**, aware; cf. Bible, *Acts*, xiv. 6: "They were ware of it."

364. **dense**, thickly crowded.

365. **black-stoled.** The *stole* was a long loose robe reaching to the feet. Cf. "In stoles of white" (*Sir Galahad*). With this description contrast that of the ship in *The Coming of Arthur*, 374-5:—

> "And all from stem to stern
> Bright with a shining people on the decks."

like a dream. As unearthly and indistinct as images seen in a dream.

366. **three Queens.** See *The Coming of Arthur*, 275-8 :—

> "Three fair Queens,
> Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
> Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
> Sweet faces, who will help him at his need."

Malory says, "One was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was the Queen of Northgales; the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands."

367. **shivered to the tingling stars,** thrilled as it mounted through the air and reached the stars that trembled in response. Cf. *The May Queen* :—

"Then seemed to go right up to heaven and die among the stars"

and *Œnone*, l. 215 :—

> "Between the loud stream and the trembling stars."

In reply to the objection that this line "has a touch of exaggeration which belongs to the 'spasmodic' school," Brimley remarks, "But the cry comes from a company of spirits amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of night, the clearness of the winter air, and the hardening effects of frost. Such a cry, at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hurtling storm of multitudinous arrow sounds, and die away in infinitely distant pulsations among the stars."

370. **where no one comes.** "The mournfulness of the feeling a man would experience in such a place, from the sense of utter isolation and sterility, is blended with the naturally sad wail of the wind over a wide waste, and the addition thus becomes no mere completion of a thought of which only part is wanted for illustration . . . . but gives a heightening of sentiment without which the illustration would be incomplete and less impressive" (Brimley). Compare Keats's—

> "Undescribed sounds
> That come a-swooning over hollow grounds
> And wither wearily on barren moors."

375. **rose the tallest ... fairest,** rose above the others in height as she stood. Malory says, "Morgan le Fay . . . . that was as fair a lady as any might be."

381. **like the withered moon,** like the moon when its light is fading before the early beams of the rising sun. Cf. *Fatima* :—

> "Faints like a dazzled morning moon."

Also Shelley, *Ode to the Skylark*, 13-16 :—

"Keen as are the arrows Of that silver sphere
Whose intense lamp narrows In the white dawn clear."

383. **greaves**, armour for the lower part of the legs: derivation uncertain. **cuisses**, armour for the thighs: Lat. *coxa*, thigh. **dashed with drops of onset**, splashed with drops of blood from the encounter. Cf. *The Princess* :—

"Though dashed with death,
He reddens what he kisses."

"'Onset' is a very generic term, poetic because removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war's pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also and heroic arts, since onset belongs to mettle and daring; the word, for vast and shadowy connotation, is akin to Milton's grand abstraction, 'Far off *his coming* shone,' or Shelley's 'Where the earthquake demon taught her *young ruin*'" (Roden Noel in *The Contemporary Review*). Cf. *The Last Tournament* :—

"Belted his body with her *white embrace*."

384. **light and lustrous**, fair in colour and shining. Arthur is described in *The Coming of Arthur* as "fair beyond the race of Britons and of men."

385. **like a rising sun**. The fair bright locks are compared with the rays surrounding the disc of the rising sun. Cf. Milton, *P. L.* iii. 625 :—

"Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders."

Arthur is thus described in *The Last Tournament* :—

"That victor of the Pagan throned in hall,
His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light."

Cf. *Tithonus* :—

"Thy dim curls kindle into sunny rings."

386. **high from the daïs-throne**, as he sat on the throne elevated on the dais or platform.

392. **shot through the lists**, as a brilliant meteor or 'shooting' star glances across the sky.

396. **my forehead and mine eyes**. This definite specification of separate items, instead of using the general term 'face,' is true to the Homeric pattern; see l. 300, above.

400. **the light ... myrrh**. Arthur is compared with the star in the East which appeared at Christ's birth to the Magi, or Wise

Men, and led them to Bethlehem, where they presented to the new-born Child offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. See Bible, *Matthew*, ii. 11.

403. **image of the mighty world.** "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table, they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world" (Malory). The belief that the world was in form round and flat, like the top of a round table, prevailed even after the globe had been circumnavigated. See *Columbus*:—

"for at last their Highnesses
Were half-assured this earth might be a sphere."

404. **companionless.** Malory's words are, "Ah, my Lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

405. **the days darken,** the future seems dark and dreary.

406. **other minds,** unsympathetic minds, different from those I have known.

408. **the old ... to new,** a line often quoted. It occurs also in *The Coming of Arthur*, 508, when the king is described as refusing to give tribute to Rome, on the ground that "the slowly fading mistress of the world" had had her day, and must give place to a new and stronger power. Cf. *In Mem.* Prol.:—

"Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be."

409. **God ... ways,** God has many methods of accomplishing on earth His purposes, which are part of His nature, and often lays aside the methods He has been using to replace them by others.

410. **lest one .. world,** lest men's hearts, relying too much upon old established usage, should stagnate and grow slothful for want of change, and thus a lifeless formalism should take the place of active belief and vigorous endeavour.

411. **comfort thyself,** etc. Malory's words are, "Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust to trust in. For I will unto the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound; and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul."

412. **that which ... pure,** may God accept my work and, absorbing it, as it were, into Himself, purify it of all its unworthy elements.

417. **like a fountain.** Cf. *Enoch Arden* :—

"Prayer ...
Like fountains of sweet waters in the sea."

419. **that nourish ... brain,** whose brute nature is blind to anything outside or above what they can estimate by instinct or material sense. Cf. Shaks. *Ant. and Cleo.* iv. 8. 21 :—

"A brain that nourishes our nerves."

422. **every way,** on all sides.

423. **bound by gold chains ... feet of God.** Cf. *Harold,* iii. 2:—

"prayer,
A breath that fleets beyond this iron world
And touches Him that made it."

The notion of the earth being attached to heaven by a golden chain perhaps originated in the passage in Homer's *Iliad*, viii. 19-30; cf. Plato, *Theæt.* 153. Frequent allusions to this supposition are to be found scattered throughout English literature. Thus Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, i. 1. 3, says, "According to the allegory of the poets the highest link of nature's chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter's chair": cf. *Adv. of L.* ii. vi. 1. Jeremy Taylor writes "Faith is the golden chain to link the penitent sinner to God." Cf. also "This is the golden chain of love, whereby the whole creation is bound to the throne of the Creator" (Hare); and

"She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,
Whose upper end to highest heven was knitt."
—Spenser, *F.Q.* ii. vii. 46.

"Hanging in a golden chain
This pendant world."—Milton, *P. L.* ii. 1051.

"It (true love) is a golden chain let down from heaven,
Whose links are bright and even,
That falls like sleep on lovers."
—Jonson, *Love's Martyr.*

"For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upward to the sky."
—Dryden, *Character of a Good Parson.*

427. **island-valley of Avilion.** Avilion, or, as it is otherwise spelt Avelion, or Avalon ("dozing in the Vale of Avalon," *Palace of Art*), is supposed to have been the name of a valley in the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, the town in Somersetshire where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have first landed from his boat with the Holy Grail. [See the Idyll of *The Holy Grail.*] Avilion is called an island as being nearly surrounded by the "river's embracement." Cf. Drayton, *Polyolbion*, iii. :—

"O three-times famous isle! where is that place that might
Be with thyself compared for glory and delight
Whilst Glastonbury stood?"

Some romances, however, make it an ocean island "not far on this side of the terrestrial Paradise," and represent it as the abode of Arthur and Morgan Le Fay. Compare with these myths the accounts of the "Islands of the Blest," the "Fortunate Islands" of Greek and Roman legends, whither the favourites of the Gods were conveyed without dying (see *Ulysses*, l. 63); also the tales of the "Flying Island of St. Brandan," and of the "Green Islands of the Ocean" in Southey's *Madoc*. Many legends tell of various enchanted islands, and the names of a number of them may be found in the *Voyage of Maeldune*. 'Avilion' is said to mean 'Isle of Apples,' from the Breton *aval*, apple.

428. **where falls ... loudly.** Cf. the description of the abode of the Gods in Tennyson's *Lucretius:* also the accounts of Elysium in Homer, *Odys.* iv. 566 and vi. 42, and Lucretius, *De Rerum Nat.* iii. 20, and Bion, iii. 16.

430. **deep-meadow'd**, a translation of the Greek βαθύλειμος, 'with rich fertile meadows,' Homer, *Il.* ix. 151. **happy.** Cf. Vergil's *lætas segetes*, 'happy (*i.e.* plenteous) harvest.' **orchard lawns**, grassy plots with fruit trees growing on them.

431. **crown'd with summer sea.** ringed round with stormless waves as with a coronet. Cf. Homer, *Odys.* x. 195, περὶ νῆσον πόντος ἐστεφάνωται, 'Round the island the sea lies like a crown.' The surrounding sea is elsewhere (*Maud*, iv. 6) called by Tennyson

"The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land."

With "summer sea" compare Wordsworth's

"And all was tranquil as a summer sea."—(*Skating.*)

435. **ere her death.** The tradition that the swan previously to her death sings a sweet song is one of long standing. Cf. Vergil, '...qualis trajectus tempora pennâ Cantat olor.' See *The Dying Swan;* also Shaks. *Othello*, v. 2, "I will play the swan and die in music," and many other passages. Mr. Nicol says of the *Cycnus Musicus*, "Its note resembles the tones of a violin, though somewhat higher. Each note occurs after a long interval. The music presages a thaw in Iceland, and hence one of its greatest charms."

436. **ruffles her pure cold plume**, unfolds her white clear wing-feathers. **takes the flood**, strikes the water.

437. **swarthy webs**, alluding to the dark colour of the swan's webbed feet.

438. **revolving many memories.** Cf. the Latin *multa animo revolvens*, 'revolving many things in his mind.'

439. **one black dot,** a single speck of black on the bright horizon where the day was dawning. The barge carries Arthur away to vanish in the East, "whence all religions are said to spring."

445. '**From the great** ... **goes.**' The weird rhyme occurs in Merlin's "riddling triplets of old time"; see *The Coming of Arthur*, 409, 10 and note.

453. **the three** ... **need.** See l. 366, above, and note.

460. **as if** ... **wars.** Contrast this united cry of triumph and welcome with the dim cries of despair in lines 41-45, and with the "agony of lamentation," "as it were one voice," in lines 368-9, above.

464. **Straining** ... **hand.** So in Sophocles, *Œdipus Coloneus*, 1650, Theseus gazes after a king who is also passing away in mystery—

ὀμμάτων ἐπίσκιον
χεῖρ' ἀντέχοντα κρατός·

469. **And the new** ... **new year.** The cycle of the mystic year is now complete from Arthur's birth—

"that same night, the night of the new year,
Was Arthur born—"

to his passing away before the dawn of another new year, and from this point

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

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